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WOMAN



EDEN PHILLPOTTS



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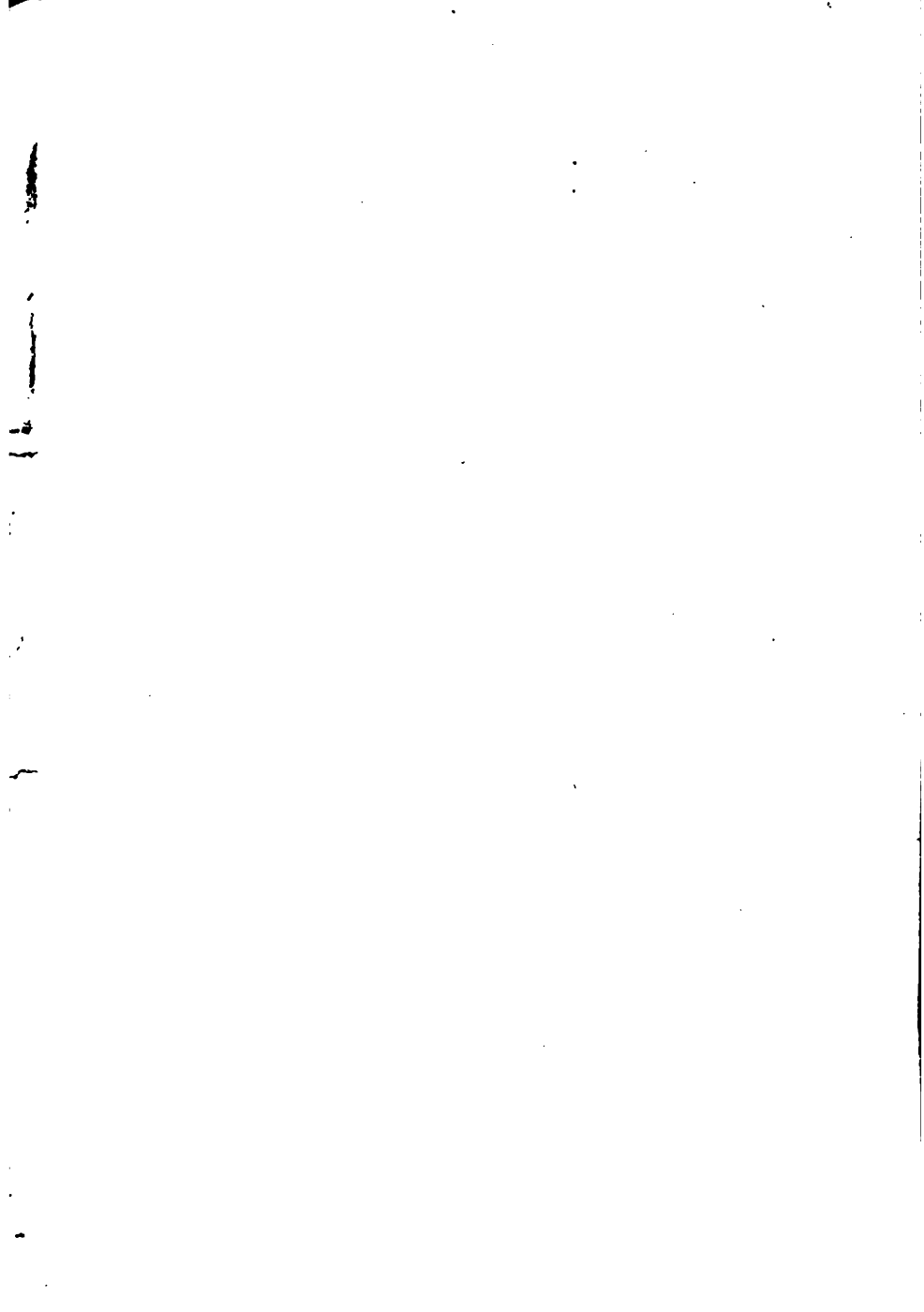
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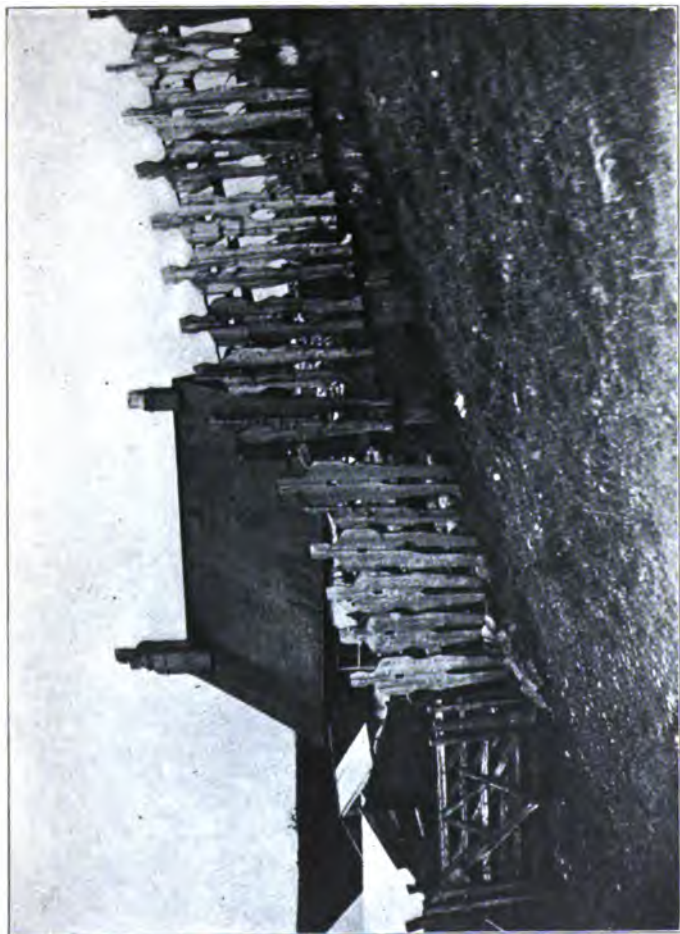


# **THE SECRET WOMAN**









WATCHETT HILL FARM.

# THE SECRET WOMAN

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

AUTHOR OF "THE AMERICAN PRISONER," "MY DEVON YEAR,"  
ETC., ETC.

New York

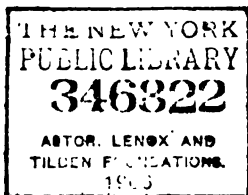
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To  
ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE  
SEER OF SUNRISE, MASTER-SPIRIT OF SONG  
THIS TRAGEDY IS INSCRIBED WITH ADMIRATION,  
RESPECT AND REGARD



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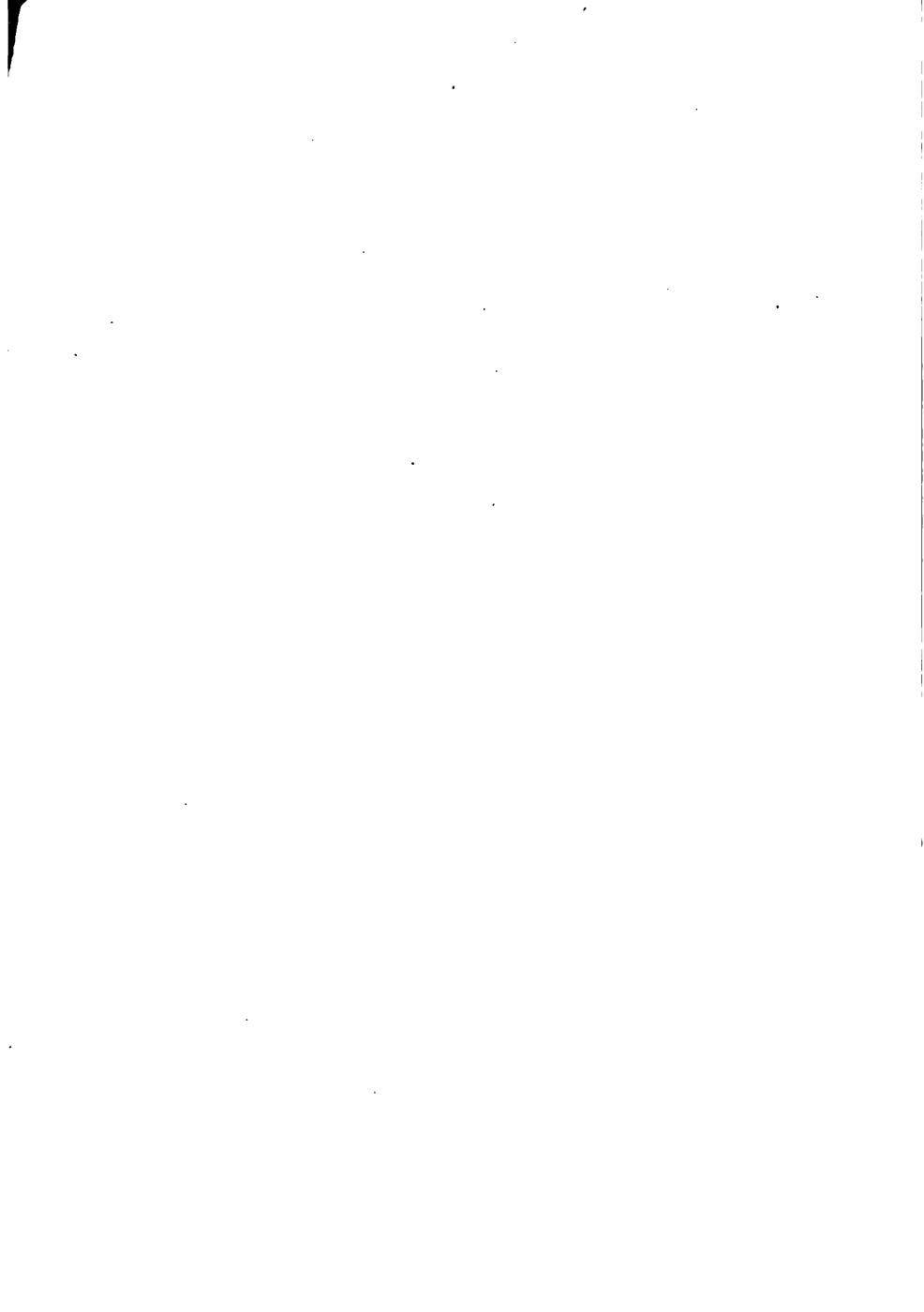
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## Book I





# THE SECRET WOMAN

## CHAPTER I

### WIND-FLOWERS

**L**ABOURING through the centuries ceaselessly together, Time's patient servants have diminished to its present altitudes and mild contours the heart of Devon. Heat and cold, torrent and glacier, the brand of the lightning and the breath of the wind have toiled upon this ruin of plutonian rocks; have disintegrated, washed and worn; have shattered the peaks that once towered here; have ground and separated the feldspar from the mica and the mica from the quartz. The frost still probes and splits each natural joint and fissure of the granite; the wind still spins gravel in the stone basins of the tors and cuts them down as in Danmonian days; the mark of the great ice cap can yet be observed by eyes skilled to read its passage; the levin roams unfettered as of yore among these lonely hills. Yet Dartmoor of the tors and mamelons shall still be found austere, primeval, unsubdued. To the human wanderer she promises neither temporal ease nor hope of gain, yet offers what is better. She is many-breasted as Artemis of the Ephesians; but since her bosom is of granite, we compare her more properly to that other Diana of the Greeks, sister of Apollo, she who in her virgin lap brings blessings, who averts evil, who stands

for the protectress of the young, prospers the flocks and speeds the hunter.

Dartmoor is an embodiment of reality and a theatre of elemental force. Her bitter cold, and shadeless heat, her dwarfed but vigorous vegetation, her solemn hills and plains of light and darkness outspread, while they repulse the urban spirit, yet sometimes waken a beholder to emotions of interest; sometimes fire the feeble soul to courage; lift the luxurious toward restraint; touch the narrow, self-centred and mean to a wider survey of existence.

At the foothills of the Moor lie forests. They surround her, creep here and there up the green coombs into her heart, and nestle beneath her throne. A thousand homesteads stand round about her and look upward to the waste for many things that make life easier. Consciously the men and women repair thither for their passing needs; unconsciously it happens to some among them that the conditions of their existence here put metal into character and forge moral chains or armour, as the case may be. Such additions, handed down from generation to generation, help the high causes of patience, temperance and courage upon one hand, or petrify the heart and make for selfishness and greed upon the other.

Of all lovely contrasts none are greater than those furnished by the passage of the moorland rivers upon the high lands and off them; and of fair regions haunted by beauty, few exceed in manifold grace the gorges, ravines and gentle, meadow-margined reaches whence these streamlets leave their mother's side for ever and pass into the vales.

Near the hamlet of Belstone, where Cosdon Beacon's enormous shoulder heaves along the skyline of eastern Dartmoor, and the jagged manes of Belstone tors lie

north and south, the little Oke departs from her cradle of granite, gathers Blackavon brook to swell her volume, dips under Halstock Hill and takes farewell of childhood.

On a day in spring, while the Moor still slept and no touch of young green broke its monochrome, the glen of Oke was alive with bird music and agleam with flowers. From Halstock woods the immediate and receding foreground shone with swelling stipules of oak trees, where the forest subtended the crown of the hill and sloped steeply down to the river. No bud had yet broken, but a warm and lustrous hue spread over all, and through this amber haze the grey lichens of the branch and the dark mosses of the bole were seen; while beneath, under a tracery and network of many boughs, young May danced deliciously in the heart of the wood. Beyond, upon the other side of the river, a hill uprose like a single flame of gold, for it was draped in the vernal furze, and its summit burnt under a cataract of pure colour against the gloom of distant tempest. Far away, toward the Severn Sea, great rains were falling and the air was washed with sheets of cloud, that deepened almost to night where Exmoor, like a purple wale, spread luridly along and mingled her high places with the storm. From the south one roaming pencil of light passed ten miles off, and fallow land shone out, as though a ruby had been flung down there amid the welter of grey rain and flying cloud. Then the ray was swallowed by darkness, and that red earth vanished.

The mellow light of the oak-buds bursting, the blaze of the spring gorse, the immense and storm-foundered distance, and the tenebrous sky, full of wild clouds hurrying and the curtains of the rain, combined to make a mighty theatre for the exhibition of two young

human figures. In a valley nest at water's brink, where bluebells took their purple and then gradually bent down their spikes to worship the earth that bore them; where primroses starred the brown underwood and where twinkling rills glittered and spouted and tumbled to the river, a man and a woman sat together, absorbed in the first subject of spring-time. At hand, in little secret haunts, the golden saxifrage flourished above unseen waters, the marsh violet opened pale purple eyes, the wood-sorrel hung out many a fairy chalice amethystine-veined. The great woodrush also lifted his bud, and the whortleberry's scarlet bells brightened her young foliage. Ferns began to uncurl their brown and silvery knots from the dead rack of the year that was past; and life awakening, mounted and climbed on every hand; while death, not unlovely, appeared in leaf-drift and touch-wood, in acorn cups, dry alder-cones and hollow hazel-nuts beneath the flowing water and leaping green. The worn-out stuff of a vanished year passed peacefully back to its elements and offered as proper an aspect of spring as buds breaking and the eggs in the nest.

A lad sat beside a girl and told her how he loved her. With trepidation he kicked away a film of moss that covered the stone under his heels. It fell in particles upon the water, twisted in an eddy, then hurried down the shining stream. The boy's eyes rested upon his companion, his hands were occupied with an ash sapling. He was tall, slight, and of trim proportions; his face, tanned with an out-door life, was clean shaven and shapely; and his brown eyes were nervous and restless but fine. His hat lay on the bank and his black locks were visible. The man's mouth had first interested any chance student of him. It was at once beautiful and weak: a woman's mouth of full and fair

lines and ripe redness. It lacked the cut that denotes character, and indicated, among other things, a natural instability of mind; just as the lofty and narrow brow spoke of high intellectual vigour but denied wide sympathies.

Jesse Redvers had just prayed a girl at his elbow to marry him, and she — soft-eyed, soft-voiced hamadryad of this budding woodland — thought awhile before replying.

The anemones spread like snow about her and she bent down and looked thoughtfully into their upturned faces. She tied the strings of her sunbonnet into small bows, then untied them, then tied them again. From under her drab gown, where she sat with her feet hanging over the river, stout shoes peeped. In her mouth was a primrose and she nibbled its juicy stalk and sucked it in slowly, pouting, like one who plays at bob-cherry. She glanced sideways at the man and he looked up at her. Her face was of the type known both as beautiful and demure — a sleepy-eyed, well-rounded, young, soft face with a fair complexion, whose purity was delicately muffled by the palest of freckles. Her eyes were large and of a light grey colour; her lashes nearly always drooped upon them. She looked at people with swift glances, then looked away. A natural smile haunted her mouth. She was a girl of soothing curves and soothing voice, quick-minded under her great composure. Men supposed her to be very timid and usually displayed gallantry before her. Women held her sly and professed not to envy the lad who might presently win her. Her hands were dainty things, hardly grown out of childhood; her slightness of raiment revealed a slim shape and neat round breasts. Salome Westaway was a natural creature, fond of comfort and impatient of any artifice in apparel

that interfered with physical work. Lithe, straight, firm and fresh as a young silver birch, she went her way. She understood her beauty, but never paraded it with womanly wiles. She was twenty, but far older than her years. Common sense in a wide measure belonged to her. Her life was hard and difficult, but she never sulked about it. Lastly, it may be said concerning the girl that the possibility of passion was manifest in the atmosphere of her. There was a large power revealed in her lips and eyes.

"Speak," said Jesse, "though by your silence I know what's coming. Sally, my pretty bird, could 'e let me make a nest for 'e? An' fight for 'e, an' claim 'e against all comers? But you say nought; an' no news ban't good news when a chap's courting."

"I'm not for a husband," she said. "'Tis very, very kind of you, Jesse; an' even my heart's a bit soft to-day — along of the lovely flowers, an' the grey-birds singing so sweet, an' the trouble at home. But we must be sensible. 'Tis all the poor can be. No time for thinking about marriages — pauper folks like us. Barbara an' me have got to keep father out of the workhouse, an' a hard matter — such a soft old spend-thrift as he is."

"But — but ———"

"I can't go out of it an' let my sister have all the work. This morning she an' father have gone down to see Mr. Arscott — 'tis the last straw. A man told him he can mortgage his life insurance in exchange for ready money. An' we hope that Mr. Arscott may see his way. If he won't, we'll have to be sold up, I reckon."

"Oh, if I could only help!"

"You can't. So that's why there ban't no room for love-making in my mind to-day. I'm wondering all

the time how sister an' our dear old man be faring with Mr. Arscott."

"He's harder than the stone he deals in."

"So he is, yet — Barbara ——"

"He offered to marry her?"

"Ess — ages ago — twice, I believe. A very steadfast fashion of man. He might find a bit of money for the sake of old times. Yet, why should he? 'Tis a silly thought."

"Ah! if I had money!"

"'If' — 'if'! Nobody's got no money to Belstone excepting Arscott. He'm made of it; an' since he's earned every penny hisself, he knows the value."

"I hope he'll be generous."

"The last thing he'd be — too wise for that. The question is whether father's insurance makes a good security for three hundred pounds. 'Tis cruel to think of our fine grazing, an' not enough money to keep the proper number of things on it. You'd never guess it to look at her, but Barbara have been hungry more'n once since Christmas. Perhaps I have too."

He struck the mossy stones with his stick.

"It makes me mad to think of it; and I'm such a useless brute — not equal to earning more money than any other man among us. But if twenty pound ——"

"No, no! — keep your savings, boy."

"I feel I could do things; but this place is like a prison to me. I can't break out of it. If it wasn't for father ——"

"But stick to him, Jesse, always — you can't do wiser than that."

"Mother's so ——"

"Better leave her out. I know very well how 'tis with you at home. But she's a very clever woman and a money-saver. Well, you've said some pretty



things to me, an' I thank you for them; but words ban't wealth — no more use than the wind-flowers all round us. For that matter, fine speeches be only wind-flowers too. Not but what I know you mean it all, an' I like the colour of your earnest eyes very much; only I'm not a marrying girl — nor you a marrying lad, for that matter. I love to be free as a bird. Though it ban't no good being free as a bird if you haven't got no more than a bird have — less, perhaps, since they pay nought for food an' clothes. Why, I be ragged. Look at my petticoat."

She pulled up her dress of shabby russet and showed a flannel petticoat, the fringe of which was not ragged, but much mended with pieces of another material.

"You should go in satins an' laces, an' a golden crown, if I could bring it about."

She lifted her eyes to her home on the hill.

"Like that gert gorse-bank there; all a-blazing. But if I could get pretty things, I'd have silver trink-rums, an' rosy ribbons, ay, an' silvery silks. I'd be a fine bird, Jesse, if I had fine feathers."

"You're an angel of loveliness now," he said.

She looked at him and her beautiful eyes dimmed to a sleepy expression that hid a wakeful spirit behind it. His little compliments sounded thin and boyish in her ear. She felt like his mother rather than his sweetheart.

"I must go home an' find out how Barbara an' father have prospered," she said. "Now hand me over the stream, please. Us have wasted two hours."

"Let me carry you over," he said; "please, please, let me, Salome!"

"Whatever will you want to do next? So young you be! You might drop me in the middle, Jesse; and I hate cold water — so does the devil, they say.

I reckon there's a lot of the devil in me sometimes."

"You may wake the devil in others; you're all angel yourself—all, to the dinky dimple there at the corner of your li'l mouth."

She patted her soft cheek and smiled, but not at him.

Presently he helped her across the stepping-stones that here traverse Oke, and together they climbed up through the gorse brakes to her father's farm, lifted above the valley.

The mean dwelling-house of Watchett Hill faced north. Plain, tar-pitched, and slated, it huddled on the great slope—a blot against the gleaming furzes that rippled to its side. Before the entrance a cabbage plot extended; the cow-yard and out-buildings lay in the rear, while the farm-lands rose above them in a wide and gentle slope to the crown of the hill. The place lacked features of interest. It revealed neither the naked dignity of absolute poverty, nor the self-respecting air of success. A circumstance, however, arrested chance beholders, for the eccentricity of its barriers challenged every eye. Round about the east and south borders, instead of wall or pale, a singular barricade arose and separated the farm's adjacencies from field and waste. Here it seemed that a stiff, erect row of men stood shoulder to shoulder at attention. All round about these guardians appeared in military ranks, and only at close quarters might a stranger gather the significance of their presence. The artillery ranges lie upon the northern quarter of Dartmoor, and these dummy men were old-time targets, riddled with much lead. Still, despite missing arms and legs, a semblance of discipline was maintained by them; and flock-master Westaway had brought them

hither to serve his purpose. Now the wooden soldiers were silver-grey. They made a stout fence and lent a martial air to the lonely habitation they surrounded.

Joseph Westaway was accustomed to regard the enclosure with pride.

"They'm a great protection from the winter wind," he said. "I wish they could keep hard times out also ; but that's too much to ax of the poor warriors."

Hither came Salome and Jesse Redvers. She bade him farewell, without any further allusion to past or future, then mounted a flight of stone steps that led up to the level of the farm ; while he, disconsolate yet not dead to hope, went upon his way into the Moor.

## CHAPTER II

### THE BUSY MAN OF BELSTONE

**W**ATCHETT Hill rose above Joseph Westaway's farm, and viewed from its rounded summit, Belstone village appeared in a snug and clustered congeries of little dwellings that faced all ways and exhibited every beauty of whitewash and rosy-wash, old thatch and venerable slate. Its roofs were crusted with moss cushions and stonecrops, or lichens of orange and grey. Blue smoke drifted along and mellowed every line. A squat church tower in the midst seemed dwarfed by eternal wind, even as the grove of sycamores round about it. In winter this ancient fane appeared through a tracery of many boughs; in summer it vanished behind the green. Now black wings fluttered in the budding tree-tops, and feathers and fragments of egg-shell dropped into the nettles and darnel upon neglected graves below; for a rookery flourished here. The birds cawed without ceasing and the music of them chimed with the clink of stone-masons' hammers hard by. Because the sound of steel on granite is a part of the daily din of man at Belstone. It begins in William Arscott's works soon after sunrise, abates awhile about noon, then continues until the working day is over.

A great common, reflecting the sky in two pools that spread upon its midst, extended beneath the village; and from here the land stretched away north-

easterly to the distant storm in three principal ridges marked off from each other. The first was fretted with detail of husbandry, where lay a mighty patchwork of fallow, green meadow and upspringing grain, with hedgerows between and scattered farms and homesteads. The second and wider sweep was robed in forests, commons, chases and a thousand fields all fading together under the rainy weather. To Hatherleigh it extended on the one hand; on the other it vanished behind the ramparts of the Moor. Lastly, against the tumultuous sky, there swelled darkling the edge of the earth.

A scene so vast spreads round this vantage ground, that the varied weather of all Western England can be marked from it. To-day, while Dartmoor is curtained in flying mist, one may note sunshine to the north and grey weather brooding upon Cornwall; to-morrow, lapped in summer, you shall gaze far off into distant tempests and observe each particular storm sweep over half a county, as it passes to the Channel, retreats inland, or fades upon the bosom of the Atlantic.

Southward of Belstone, Taw river rolls into the valleys; and, featureless save where larches fledge its eastern slopes, Cosdon Beacon rises in many a solemn sweep to the graves of the stone-heroes that crown it. From that ruined cairn in olden time the bale-fire blazed, where now at seasons of rejoicing bonfires twinkle.

Though the time was May, a sobriety of hue still marked this huge hill. Scarcely a green blade might be seen; the black leprosy of the swaling fires spread gloomily upon it, and the heath continued of a dark and dreary brown. Sedge and rush showed as yet little sign of life; only in the bogs a mist of green light marked the waterways, and elsewhere the mosses, with

which these wastes are largely interwoven, imparted a warmer tinge to the sere herbage.

Under foot the little toad-rush bloomed and small things told singly that it was spring as Barbara Westaway and her father passed through the familiar vastness of this scene. While Salome, with a primrose between her lips, heard love in the dingles of Halstock, her sister walked steadily along to a trying ordeal.

Joseph Westaway's legs were not as long as his daughter's, and he trotted to keep pace with her. His countenance was of a placid and amiable type. Scarcely a wrinkle marked his red face, though the fringe beneath his chin was snowy. Of a faint blue colour were his eyes, and a youthful expression sat in them. When he put on his glasses he looked like a boy masquerading in his granddad's spectacles, if one disregarded his bald head. A humorous mouth that twitched genially at the corners and a flat and kindly nose were the remaining features to mark about the flock-master's countenance; while a large generosity, a love of good cheer, and an absolute trust in God represented the special characteristics of his mind. But greater than these particulars was the spirit that inhabited him, lightened his load of temporal difficulties and made life easy to be borne, despite the daily struggle with details. All men felt affection for Joe Westaway; none pretended to respect him; yet there was that in his magnificent and real contentment that merited respect, had his friends been subtle enough to perceive it.

Barbara resembled her sister, but could boast less actual beauty. She was a tall, dark maiden, and had indeed been handsome but for her expression. This was careworn and too old for a woman of eight-and-twenty. Her eyes were like her father's, and she

showed his solid type of figure, but she stood some inches taller than he did, and, as became a woman, was lighter in the bones and fuller in the flesh. Since her mother's death, twelve years before this spring-time, her beauty had waned, and during that period she had stood between Mr. Westaway and tribulation. He trusted her with all things and looked to her for an answer to every question. She was generous, quick, and, with him, very patient. But sometimes he made her lose her temper, and then the truth about himself would hurtle on the old man's ears. For the rest, she lived her own life, as her sister did. They were good friends, but their comradeship was built on reservation rather than revelation. Each had her secrets from the other; each made her own friendships. Eight years separated them, and the three brothers who came between were all dead.

"Something tells me that Billy Arscott will lend a hand," said Mr. Westaway, as he and his daughter walked into the village. "I've a great trust in signs. Did 'e mark how many li'l, happy-faced children us met by the church?"

"School's just over."

"I know that; but their smiles be a hopeful sign, an' I love the sight of 'em."

"The pennies you give 'em on the sly would ——"

"Not now. No spare pennies for many a day — worse luck. But they'm just as merry when they see me."

"You'm so soft with'm, my old dear."

"I love 'em in a general way. Their faces be little books where the history of the next generation's written, if a body had wit to read it. There's the solid, sensible child—an' we know he'll never set the sieve on fire, yet he may make a good, faithful figure in the world for

all that ; an' there's the wilful sort, as shows trouble for themselves, if not for others, in their bright eyes ; an' there's the cranky sort, as wants a firm hand on the reins if they'm to turn out right ; an' there's the shifty, silent sort, as ban't fond of company. You'll find them minching from school alone ; an' they keep their small secrets — as where the big trout do lie an' where the bullfinch have her nest. They'm close an' cunning — poor li'l dears. An' a score of other kinds there be — all the sorts that it takes to make up a world."

They had reached the centre of Belstone as he spoke, and Barbara, without replying, opened a gate into a garden beside the way and held it for her father to pass before her. The house of William Arscott faced the village green, and upon the other side of this brief expanse stood his granite works. Here appeared open sheds, a litter of dust and chipped stone, a dozen blocks slowly shaping for various purposes, and men at work upon them. The enterprise stretched like a grey smudge against the grass, and from it arose pleasant and ringing harmonies. Here was made almost everything that can be fashioned from granite. Channelling and kerbing, corbels, pillars, garden rollers, gate-posts, troughs, and gravestones, all grew here under the eternal melody of the mallets and chisels.

Unseen, at his parlour window, 'the busy man of Belstone,' as Arscott was called, could survey his people. None knew when he might be behind the chintz curtain, for he always came and went by the back door of his dwelling-house, and it was his custom to surprise all who laboured for him, whether at these works, or in the quarry a mile away upon the Moor. Therefore the men and boys whom he employed were never sure whether the master's eye might not be upon them, and they rarely wasted their time in consequence.



William Arscott was a neat, trim man of fifty, with a narrow and clean-shaven countenance. Deep lines scored his cheeks, dipped from nostril to mouth, and clustered in rays round his small eyes. The hair-tufts of his eyebrows had been tawny, but they were now turning, and his red-brown, close-cut poll was also spattered with grey. His mouth was a lipless slit above a pointed chin, and his nose — broken in youth — had grown more and more crooked gradually as the cartilage on one side drew it to the left.

The stone merchant expected Mr. Westaway, and now he opened the door of the little house wherein he lived. Nature has her seasons; Arscott had not. In his house it was always winter, and the frosty simplicity of his parlour chilled old Joe Westaway as he entered. Everything stood in position. Only one mark of wear might have been discovered within that room: on the carpet behind the window-curtain. Unlike most Belstone folk, Arscott entered his parlour every working day of the week, but never visited it on Sunday, when the chisels and hammers were still.

The room struck cold and cheerless. A few glittering oleographs hung on the walls; Berlin wool-work and some shabby books decorated the table; the furniture was upholstered with a fabric of steel-blue rep, and the smell of the shop still clung to it, though every piece had been there for years. Mr. Arscott swept aside a photographic album and a few story-books left by lodgers in his mother's time. Then he placed a pen, ink and paper upon the table, and invited the flock-master to take a seat.

"Sit down and be easy, Mr. Westaway," he said. "I'm glad to see you and Miss Barbara in my home. It is a great pleasure to think I can do you a service. Once I hoped I should call you 'father,' and though

I say it, you'd have had a useful sort of son-in-law. However, though man proposes, a woman don't always say 'yes.'"

He looked at Barbara; but she showed no emotion. She had taken off her sunbonnet and was standing in front of a glass that hung over the mantelshelf. Her hair was done in the plain, old way—smooth and straight from parting to ear. She moistened a finger and put a lock in place.

"The mould be got in your looking-glass," she said.

"Well, William," began Mr. Westaway, "the long an' short of it is that I'm pinched for money, an' have been any time this twenty year, for that matter. Now I really must have some, for it don't become a man of my age an' position in this place to be without it."

"Quite right. You ought to have it at your time of life."

"We want three hundred," said Barbara.

"Well, that's a lot; but still, with Mr. Westaway's insurance policy behind you, there should be no difficulty."

"A mortgage is the name of the thing," explained the farmer, "a mortgage on my life insurance; an' there's no shame to a mortgage."

"None in the world," said Arscott. "Who can say he's gone through his life without doing it one time or another?"

"For that matter 'tis well known you've lent money to a good few hereabouts," declared Barbara.

"Well, I have. Money's money, and I am glad to do anybody a turn for a return. But don't think I'm made of money, because it isn't so."

"Business is business," said Mr. Westaway. "I'm not a flyer at figures myself, but 'tis well known that

you are, William. So I come to you to lend me three hundred pound on my security."

"Ample—ample!"

"Where's the last receipt 'pon my life, Barbara?" asked the farmer.

She produced it and he spoke again.

"You let old Johns have twenty pound at six per cent., his wife told me. Now, in my case——"

Barbara interrupted, after frowning at her father.

"That was quite different to us," she said, "because Johns had no security but an honest son. You'll never charge nothing like so much as that against us, I should hope."

She fixed her eyes on Arscott and waited for his answer.

"I wish I could say 'no.' I wish I could let you have the money for nought. But you wouldn't like to be under any obligations to me. I know what you Westaways are—proud—proud as turkey-cocks."

"Don't think it," replied the old man. "You're out there, William. I've got my faults, hunderds of 'em, but proud I'm not. My darters may be—'tis a fault of youth; but I ban't. I've lived too close to the beasts of the field all my life to put on airs an' graces. They shame us—the dumb things do. But as for six per centum—why that's eighteen pound a year."

"The insurance people themselves would do it for less," said Barbara, "an' you know they would, Mr. Arscott."

He shook his head.

"I don't think so—I'm almost sure they wouldn't. And if they could, it's not very nice borrowing from strangers. Money's good for six per cent. in my hands; still, since you say you're not above a little bit of a favour, I'll say five an' a half."

"That's business," declared Mr. Westaway. "I'm not hard, William. I wouldn't beat you or anybody down. But since you meet me half-way, I'm ready as a Christian to go t'other half."

"All the same, 'tis too much still," declared the woman. "I lay you'd raise it for four an' a half to Okehampton."

"Where?" asked the stone merchant. "Tell me where, Miss Barbara, an' I'll give you a five-shilling piece to buy a pair of gloves. Come now!"

"I heard Doctor Blight say so to Mr. Widey at the 'Hearty Welcome.'"

"That won't do for me. Us all know the doctor. *He* won't get no money at four and a half, nor at ten and a half neither — too fond of sporting. However, five and a half and welcome. Here's the document. I'll fill it in an' hand you a cheque, if you like. Can't be done for less."

"That's sixteen, ten a year?"

"To be paid half-yearly — at Michaelmas an' Lady Day."

Mr. Westaway tried a pen upon his thumb.

"To think of the ups an' downs!" he said. "You mightn't guess it, but I've signed a cheque for fifty-two pound in my time, an' thought nothing of it. Yet now I really don't —"

"Go on, father," said Barbara. "What we was can't interest Mr. Arscott. 'Tis what we may be."

The merchant shot a sharp look at her.

"'Tis what you might have been did interest me, but I wasn't good enough for you."

"That's nearly ten years old," she answered; "an' I never said you weren't good enough. I said you wasn't the man — that's all."

"You mustn't hold that a grievance," declared Mr.

Westaway. "Barbara couldn't marry you because you never filled her eye. You should respect her for it. Many a smaller sort of woman would have jumped at you because of your money."

"You'll have noticed that I bided a bachelor evermore."

"Yes. 'Tis wonderful how tidy you keep the place, come to think of it," answered she indifferently.

Mr. Arscott looked unkindly at her, then sniffed.

"Well, I'll just ask old Ned Pearn from my works to drop in and witness to your signature," he said.

For a moment father and daughter were left alone, and Barbara rated her parent soundly.

"You'm so soft—all sugar an' water, like a ripe plum—you silly old man. Now you'll pay at least three pound a year more than there was any call to pay."

"What's that? Bah! Us must take these operations of money in a big spirit. What do you know about such deep dealings?"

He pointed to the papers before him.

"Such things be for men, my girl. Here's provisions as to paying interest, I see. 'Pears to me that it goes on compounding against me if it ban't paid; but paid it will be, so there's no call to mind that lawyer's stuff."

"An' I'm sure I hope we'll soon pay back the three hundred itself. I hate this job terrible."

"Trust me. I'm always so punctual as the sun with money—when I've got it. All in good time. Of course us mustn't pay back the principal too sudden. 'Twould be indecent an' make the man think I under-valued it. He has his feelings like the rest of us."

Arcott and a labourer returned. The man watched Mr. Westaway write his name and then attested it.

"'Tis a high operation of money, Ned Pearn," explained the borrower.

"So long as it ban't mine, mister, I don't care," said the old stone-cutter. He was bent double and his hands were calloused into mere pincers; for he had done little with them but hold a chisel and hammer for fifty years.

"You can set down your name with the best, I see, Ned," said Barbara amiably.

Mr. Pearn nodded and a heavy gratification slowly crept over his face.

"I can read too. There's a good few men an' women about here as would be surprised to know my parts, though I never was eggicated."

"'Tis what we learn ourselves that sticks, Ned," declared his master. "Now, don't waste time; but get back-along to your gate-posts, my lad. They'll be the pride of Tawton Court when set up."

Mr. Pearn departed and ten minutes later Barbara and her father took their leave.

"'Tis an amazing thing how easy money be to come by if you only know the ways of it," said Mr. Westaway as he tapped his breast-pocket. "Us'll go down along to-morrow to Mr. Bolitho's bank an' cash this here. A cheque be but a shadow of money, as I've always felt; an' that though I've signed many an' many a one."

"More than half has got to go to they stock raisers. We must husband the balance. There's only four pound in the bag."

Mr. Westaway nodded.

"Not a penny shall be wasted, or I'll know the reason why," he said.

Half-way up the hill he stopped to blow and his daughter went slowly forward that she might speak with neighbours who had seen her and were waiting.

A little black-eyed girl passed the farmer and curtseyed to him.

"Marnin', sir!" she said.

He beamed upon the infant.

"Ah, Minnie Bickford, come here, my pretty, an' give me a kiss, will 'e? You ban't afeared of my white stubbly chin, I know—such a brave maiden as you be!"

She kissed him and laughed into his face. Then, with his eye on Barbara's back, Mr. Westaway felt in his pocket, found a halfpenny, dropped it into the child's fat hand and hastened on, where his daughter stood and spoke with two men.

They were Anthony Redvers, master of Harter Farm upon the Moor, and his younger son, Michael.

"I congratulate you, Joe," said Mr. Redvers. "This is good news that I hear. Arscott's not an easy man, but he's great at business. You're in safe hands, for certain, while you pay up the interest."

Barbara nodded doubtfully. The voice of Anthony Redvers was deep and pleasant; it always had a soothing effect upon his friends.

"Be your missis home yet?" asked Mr. Westaway.

"No; she'm still along with her mother, to Holsworthy. But us shall soon have her back now. Old lady be nearly well again, from last accounts."

"I was there on Friday," said Michael Redvers, "an' I seed mother, of course. Granny's going to come down house again in a day or two—thanks to mother's nursing."

Anthony Redvers talked aside to Mr. Westaway.

"'Twill lighten the load, I hope, and you'll tide over the trouble."

"Yes, yes. I shall do things in a larger spirit henceforward. I be old myself an' beyond ambition, an' only give me a bottle of Plymouth gin an' my baccy, you can pinch me anywhere else you please; but 'tis different with my young women. Here's Barbara, only twenty-eight yet, an' fair as a rose; an' Salome — as be a wife for a king, I'm sure. They shall not be narrowed so long as I can put my hand to a document an' get money by it. Their happiness is my happiness, Anthony."

"You'm a silly old dear," said Barbara, "an' your two geese be swans. Now come home to dinner, do."

They went their way, while Redvers and his son passed onward beneath the Belstone tors to their home.



## CHAPTER III

### HARTER FARM

SEEN from afar, the home of Anthony Redvers and his family represented three points of colour clustered closely together in the midst of the surrounding waste. One spot was blue, one was red, the third glittered like silver if the sun touched it; and by night, when all else at Harter was swallowed in darkness, the moonlight sometimes rested here and made an earth-born star.

These patches of colour lay in the heart of hills above Oke river. Westward the peaks and points of Rough Tor, Mil Tor and Yes Tor rose raggedly behind each other to the highest ground in Devon; and in the immediate west a ridge of lofty land sheltered the farm from sleepless winds. Infinite loneliness marked this homestead; according to the instinct of the beholder, he rejoiced at the spectacle of such isolation, or lamented over it as a scene forlorn.

Upon near approach, the blue spot resolved itself into slate tiles above a sturdy dwelling-house, whose narrow windows, like anxious eyes, frowned upon the east; the red spot was a tiled barn of ample proportions and modern erection; while upon the other side of the yard appeared the pale and glittering point, now enlarged to a sheet of corrugated iron upon a stable. Near the farm stood a well under a little pent-roof, and below it, dropping over the hill to the river, extended

a plantation of stunted fir and larch. The trees fought with poor success against their environment, and scarce offered poultry safe roosting from foxes. Round about spread ploughed land that showed dark against the waste, but upspringing oats brushed one croft with young blades. In the valley-bottom a meadow or two shone deep green against the alternate gloom and pallor of the Moor. Walls of dry-built stone surrounded Harter, and its outlying lands rose in a fork between the Blackavon brook and the Oke, where these streamlets ran together at the ford of Culliver's Steps.

Beneath the Belstone tors a rough track ran to Harter, and now Redvers and his son, followed by a sheep-dog and a terrier, proceeded along it to their home.

Anthony was a man of genial visage and the truth of his face did not all appear, for a great amber-coloured beard concealed it. He was tall, fair and handsome, with gentle eyes, and a deep voice that came from the lungs. His lips were full and large, but a heavy moustache quite hid them; his chin had indicated infirmity of purpose, but that member also did not appear. This amiable and gentle soul was of will so weak, that his dog or horse possessed and displayed greater decision of character. Often, when choice of paths confronted them, with little advantage to set one above the other, Anthony would let a beast lead him, and proceed with unconscious gladness that he had escaped responsibility of decision. His personal tastes and inclinations rarely appeared, and when they did so, seemed little superior to the tropism of a medusa or a plant. But his wife held him more than a mere help-mate and the necessary step to home and family. She loved him too—as we love the unfortunate relation

who lacks full measure of brain power. They had been married twenty-one years, and a tacit, if not a perfect, understanding obtained between them. She had chilled his uxorious and fond disposition; but he never resented that and would always take fire at a soft word or smile. The man was forty and his wife six months younger. His gentle nature had neither touched nor influenced her character, which was stern, ungracious and of a lofty mould. She ruled with justice and rarely troubled to examine the inner growth of their union; he assented gladly to her will, was well content that Ann Redvers should take first place in the home, trusted her, respected her strength and moral character, and only sulked a little secretly when she seemed more cold and preoccupied than usual, or met his outbursts of affection with ill-concealed impatience. Very sensitive he was, after the nature of amorous men; but one-and-twenty years of wedlock with a loftier spirit had imparted to him much useful knowledge. He possessed little self-esteem and prided himself on nothing but his wife, his sons and his striking personal appearance. He was much liked by all who knew him, for in his presence, despite a handsome face and imposing mien, most men felt secretly superior, and consequently exhibited regard for one who inspired that grateful sensation. It was felt that he had married the woman of all others best fitted to keep him prosperous and happy. Of Mrs. Redvers people said that she was capable, not that she was kind. They extended to her the ceremonious prefix, both to her face and behind her back. Expression grew grave when she was the matter, and all her sex agreed that she was a pattern, to be copied at a distance. Intimacy seemed not possible with her. She came of old Dartmoor stock and her forefathers had wrestled sternly

with the hungry soil and harsh weather for generations. The gravity of that eternal battle was in her blood, and it tintured her spirit. Her thoughts were generally grey; her practice was all towards restraint in pleasure; her morals were scrupulous and her religion stern. She loved work, not only for its results, but also for itself. She had a passionate temper well under control, and she was highly intolerant of self-indulgence in any shape. Hard chairs, plain food, cold water and cold rooms were the rule at Harter; and her ordinance all followed without question.

She had but two children, Jesse and Michael. The boys were twenty and eighteen respectively. By a chance Jesse, the elder, displayed his mother's colour and cast of features, together with much of his father's disposition; while Michael was a fair lad, yet reflected Mrs. Redvers in his nature and loved her with all his heart. Like clave to like insensibly.

Jesse Redvers possessed stronger intellect than his father, but he inherited the parental virtues and defects. He mourned his lot and felt vague possibilities within him. He supposed that his circumstances and calling were too mean to make any wider existence, that should embrace the reality of life, possible for him. He had aspirations and desired great things to overtake him, but knew not the only real greatness is that which a man himself overtakes. No experiences ever fell to his share; nothing ever happened to him. The trivial and punctual daily round and all its meanings missed him, albeit he pursued life upon the very bosom of Nature. He hungered for some notable and stunning event to catch him in its movement, to uplift him, try his metal, and perhaps set him a hero's task. Unconsciously his spirit echoed the thought of an impatient philosopher. It seemed not good to him thus

to waste his years amid things trite, familiar and indifferent; he cared not merely to state what happened to him and patiently to learn wisdom from the mighty stone tablets of history spread round about his home; he thirsted to record not how the Universe had treated him, but how he had treated it, how he had judged, weighed, approved or condemned. He sighed to collect data for this task; he lifted his eyes to a wider horizon and his thoughts to wider issues.

His mother held him a discontented and foolish boy. She hoped that he would presently waken, fall in love and so come by a practical ambition and dream no more. It was characteristic of the lack of sympathy between them that Jesse had loved Salome Westaway for a year and Ann guessed it not. As for Anthony Redvers, in a shadowy fashion he did understand his elder son. They had a sort of private bond, and talked together uneasily at times under high stress. Even for his father's poor comprehension Jesse was thankful, and paid the sympathy with deep regard.

Michael, on the other hand, found his mother absorb his affection. He imitated her and possessed her virtues and singleness of purpose. He loved work, lacked imagination, and had a mind of a practical cast. He felt little in common with Jesse and secretly despised his father. Anthony's feebleness was apparent to the youth, and Michael's small knowledge of life did not permit him to appraise the worth of the opposing parental virtues, or judge how much the world forgives to unfailing good temper, to charity and to inherent warmth of heart.

Without any open differences, or one harsh word, the family had thus drifted into two camps and divided, but not against itself. Parity of interest marked them, combined with sharp distinctions of character. All

laboured for the common good, and even Jesse had no thought to shirk duty or accomplish less than his share of the hard work. They lived a life of toil as a matter of course; and diversity of mind, that had led to strife in a household less strenuous, here, by force of circumstances, produced no painful result.

Physically both parents and children enjoyed health. The father and mother were without spot or blemish; their sons had grown into powerful lads and knew no weakness. Disorders scarcely clouded their experience; yet at the present, Mrs. Redvers was away from home on nurse's duty; and life at Harter Farm without her seemed a ghost of itself.

Anthony indeed missed his wife at every turn and felt but half a man in her absence; Michael too growled about it and made endless excuses for getting over to Holsworthy to see her; only Jesse was indifferent. Like the rest of the world, he respected his mother sincerely; but she had shaken him from his dreams so often; she had misunderstood him from childhood (as he believed) so completely; and she had reproved his truant and unstable disposition with such frankness, that he loved her little. The young are egotistical by nature. Jesse was only clamorous for sympathy. The inner lives of his parents, with their cares and problems, did not matter to him. That his father possessed secret interests, pleasures, ambitions, or was ever uneasy or unhappy, scarcely occurred to the youth. To a lad not yet of age, a father of forty appears old and already lifted beyond the dagger-thrust of feeling or the storms of sense; while to the man, in the full struggle and stress of emotion that wait at the edge of middle life, it is hard to realise how his growing lad, yesterday a child, has already plunged deep into the inevitable secret existence of the heart, is already

living the inner existence of mystery and wonder, of hope and baffling chance that none shares with him.

Jesse's egoism appeared in his earliest reflective days. As a very small child it had been a puzzle and an annoyance to him that his paternal grandmother had found in him a likeness to his dead grandfather. Such a resemblance was naturally more to the ancient widow than the fact that Jesse existed in himself as a fine growing boy; but he resented it when she put on her spectacles, looked long into his eyes, then occupied her old heart with awakened memories and quite forgot the object that had roused them.

The last dwellers at Harter were Nathaniel Tapp, a childless hind, and his wife. Sarah Tapp's individuality had long since been swallowed up by that of her mistress, and she was no more than an elderly echo of the younger woman; but her husband's character and sombre convictions were his own.

Now Jesse met Michael and his father, and Mr. Redvers asked him where he had been.

"In Halstock Glen," he answered.

"So pretty as a painted picture too, I'll warrant," said the farmer. "What days I've seen down there!"

His thoughts fell back upon a vanished spring-time when, happier than his son, he had asked a maiden to wed him among the forgotten primroses of years ago, and she had said "yes."

"There won't be no more mooning about beside the river after Sunday," said Michael.

"Firing begins sure enough," declared his father. "Well, for my part, I'm glad for us to put on our red coats again. It means hard work an' hard cash for all of us."

He referred to the military operations that now absorb a wide tract of northern Dartmoor. Here

artillery ranges extend over many miles of the waste, and Harter Farm lies within the firing zone and belongs to Government. Certain privileges accompany a tenant's possession, however, and as range-clearer Mr. Redvers received handsome wages. The guns thundered and bellowed here from May until September; and Anthony was well pleased to hear the hollow echoes of the hills renew their voices, roll and reverberate, break out again far off, and die; for artillery practice meant to him good money. His was the task to rise at dawn, mount his pony, and, with his sons, ride out into the Moor and clear the line of fire from those flocks and herds that wandered within it. Redvers learnt from the camp beforehand concerning which ranges the cannon would occupy, and, donning his scarlet jacket of office, set off at daylight to drive away all grazing beasts, so that no white fleece, nor red hide, nor rusty black pelt of the little ponies and their foals should suffer injury or incur danger. His work was usually done before breakfast; but sometimes a herd of stubborn bullocks—wild from torment of stinging flies—or the nimble Scottish cattle that haunt this lonely region, would long defy his efforts and keep him and his sons in the saddle until the guns were laid and dummy men of cloth or wood patiently awaited the storms of lead from bursting shells.

"They begin on No. 2 and No. 3 ranges at half after ten," said Anthony. "They've gotten some wonderful, new, German-made guns, Corporal Tomlin tells me. Us must be moving by four at latest. Me an' Jesse will clear No. 3, an' you'll look after No. 2, Michael, an' take 'Spider' along with you."

The old English sheep-dog, "Spider," looked up at the sound of his name and wagged a stump of tail.



He was a gaunt, iron-grey, long-legged creature, with a high stern, like a baboon, and wonderful brown eyes that glittered through the shaggy hair on his face. The brute understood his work and had long proved a treasure upon the ranges.

## CHAPTER IV

### PHILOSOPHERS

**A**NTHONY REDVERS would sometimes walk into Belstone after his supper to meet friends at the "Hearty Welcome" and discuss the times. When his wife was at home he rarely came; but of late he found the evening hour a dreary one, and after night-fall often visited at the inn or occupied himself elsewhere away from Harter.

Old Joseph Westaway, on the contrary, always tramped down to Belstone after supper. Only winter's snow interrupted the custom, and when he chanced to meet Anthony he was glad, because the younger man could give him an arm up the hill again.

A larger company than usual met one night around the bar of the inn, and the talk was of the artillery whose familiar thunder had now begun to beat again upon Belstone ears. Nathaniel Tapp had accompanied his master, for they were good friends, and Nat, though a stern man of hard and fast opinions, was not a total abstainer. There were also present Ned Pearn, the aged stone-worker, and other of Arscott's staff, including one Joshua Bloom, from the granite quarry on Belstone Tor.

To this man Anthony spoke.

"I comed round by the quarry after range-clearing this morning, but heard as you'd took a holiday, Joshua. Ban't much in your line?"

"Ess, I did. I went down to Okehampton for to look at the outside of the union workhouse by the river. Be damned if it don't draw me. An' every day brings me a step nearer."

Mr. Bloom was a stout man of sixty-five. He had a hairless, highly coloured face, round, moist eyes like a cow's, a small voice and a large, wet mouth, which was generally a little open, and which he constantly dried with a red pocket-handkerchief. A forlorn expression marked his features. He was exceedingly poor, and he never wearied of grumbling about it. A feud obtained between him and fate; and while civil to his fellow-men, providence he openly insulted whenever its ways formed matter of conversation.

"Arscott would never let you come to that—such a just man as him," said Mr. Westaway. "Why, he's been known to give a boy or girl a shilling for nothing afore now."

Bloom looked round to see that no enemy was present.

"'Tis well for you to talk, Joe Westaway. He've lent you money, we all know. See you pay it back by the appointed time—else you'll find yourself in the workhouse too."

"Have a drop of spirits, Josh. You'm down-daunted," said Redvers. "I'm sure 'tis a very silly thing to brood over troubles afore they come. Why for should you go in the house more than any other man—a bachelor with a bit put by, I daresay?"

"Not a penny—God's my judge," declared Bloom earnestly. "I've tried an' tried, but it never stops. What's a man to do wi' two maiden sisters both so old as the hills, an' one a bed-lier? Yes, I'll drink to better luck, for other people. There's no luck for me."

"You don't trust in the A'mighty enough," declared Tapp. He was a lean, wiry man with grey hair, a sharp, pinched nose, blazing eyes and a pointed chin only half hidden by a thin beard.

"Ah! easy to say that. We ban't all in the service of Mr. Redvers here, who gets shillings and shillings a day for range-clearing, an' is generous to them he employs. My work's hammering stone, an' that's a fair pattern of my life. I drew a blank at birth."

"Josh be in a rage along of that dreadful sharp weather three nights ago," explained Mr. Toby Hannaford, the landlord. "They late frosts have ruined his potatoes."

"Ess," burst out Bloom, "an' well I may be. It makes me dance to hear you men so trustful an' contented wi' everything. Look at my earlies—all scorched black by that damned frost—an' then say whether I ban't in reason to be vexed."

Tapp answered him.

"God's got something better to do than fuss after your earlies, Joshua Bloom."

"Then He's not the God I've took Him for," answered the quarryman defiantly. "He did *ought* to have looked after my earlies. I've done my part for half a century, an' nobody knows it better'n Him; an' parson will tell you the same. An' then to have my patch, as I count on, to give my old sisters their little bit of comfort, ruined that shameful."

"At your old game," said Tapp, "book-keeping with the Lord, an' making out all the loss be your side, all the profit His. There's a lot like you in the world, Joshua."

"Us have all suffered, for that matter," declared Mr. Westaway, "but we must keep within reason, souls. God won't turn the laws of Nature upsy-down

to suit our cabbage gardens. If anybody's to blame, 'tis Nature's self; an' I will say she goes on the loose sometimes at this season of the year, like a woman in drink, an' pulls down with one hand what she've built up with t'other."

"Then A'mighty God should look after her a bit sharper, an' not let her play the fool with poor, hard-working people," said Mr. Bloom sulkily. "It comes back to Him, though you may try your bestest to make a case. He could have turned thicky beastly frost into a night of warm, useful rain, if He'd liked to do it; but He let it freeze; an' it weren't a kindly thing."

"It will do the stone-fruit good, for it kept back the blooth," said Mr. Pearn, who owned a fine cherry tree.

"Then let them as has stone-fruit be thankful, Ned," answered the other. "I've got nought but gooseberries, an' it's ruined them."

He mopped his mournful mouth, then nodded to Anthony Redvers and drank half a tumbler of gin and water.

"'Tis wonderful to me," declared Mr. Tapp, "that the A'mighty has power to stretch forth His arm an' save from the burning even a man who talks like you. Though the risks you run be something frightful, Joshua."

"Not at all. I do my part, an' I have my opinions, an' there's no law in Scripture, or any other book, against free speech. My record's clean, an' I've never lost a single chance of bettering myself honestly in my life."

"That's true. We may say of you that you've never been known to refuse a drink or an offer of money, Josh — have you now?" asked the landlord, smiling.

"Never since I comed to years of discretion," replied Mr. Bloom earnestly. "Any man can prove it any hour of the day."

"That's not enough for the Lord of Hosts," answered Tapp, "not if I know Him. You never took what He sent without grumbling. You've always fought about it—like a child as won't let down its physic. You was too stiff-necked with Him always, an' be so still. You ban't on your knees groaning enough—that's what's the matter with you, Bloom."

"As to that," answered old Pearn, "you and me take different views, Nathaniel Tapp. An' I b'lieve Joshua here thinks same as I do. Prayer's waste of time so often as not. The prayer to pray be the one as you can answer yourself. Look at me, as can read an' write, an' taught myself to put down what I'd got to say with this hand, though it ban't much better than a crab's claw. But 'twas sweat of an evening an' sore eyes went to it, not prayer. To this day the pen makes my arm ache more'n a hammer do."

"Hard work's the only prayer as gets answered 'pon Dartmoor," declared Anthony Redvers; "a man must trust in his own right arm."

"Ah! that's where you an' missis don't think alike," retorted Tapp; "you'd better not say that at home."

Anthony led the laugh against himself, stroked his great beard and beamed about him.

"Ah! Nat knows what it is to be married so well as me. I've knowed him get a flea in his ear afore to-day."

"All the same, what you tell 'bout praying prayers is truth," said Bloom seriously. "Why, d'you mind when Taw came down in a flood an' drowned the mill an' reached the Sticklepath pigsties by night? There was Jimmy Johns—he bided in bed an' prayed with-

out ceasing for his pigs till daylight; an' they was drowned to a pig. An' Slocombe, half a mile down the river — a chap as don't believe in God or devil — went out with his two men an' his lanterns an' worked like a steam engine, all up to his middle in water, an' saved every creature he'd got, down to a fine farrow not two weeks old. What d'you think of that, Nathaniel?"

"Only that Johns was fool enough to ax the Lord to make a miracle for him," answered Mr. Tapp. "But the man always had cheek enough for an army. The A'mighty won't do our work. He's got His own."

"An' I lay Taw river in flood took Him all His holy time," added Mr. Westaway.

"You see, Joshua," he continued, "they pigs of Jimmy Johns' wasn't a matter for prayer, but for mighty hard work; but 'tis just like Jimmy to shirk a tough job, an' bide in his warm bed, an' pray for all he was worth whenever he chanced to wake up."

"Most prayers be only a trick to get God round to our way of thinking, all the same," argued Bloom. "Will 'e have a drink with me now, if you please, Mr. Redvers?"

Anthony nodded, and the moralist continued.

"To church I'm sure it is so. The Prayer Book be one for Him an' two for ourselves from first to last."

"And why for not?" asked Mr. Tapp. "We want all the saving we can get, I'm sure; an' some of us be past saving altogether, in my opinion."

"I ban't, anyway, if that's what you'm hinting," answered Bloom sharply. "If ever there was a case of 'well done, thou good an' faithful servant,' I'm the man; an' 'twould be false modesty to pretend otherwise. Nobody knows it better than Him, to say it

without any feeling. I ought to be richly rewarded, instead of which I'm so near the workhouse as damn it. Not that it makes any difference to my ways. I'm so straight as a line—always have been, always shall be. I shall keep on going to church just as usual. It shan't never be brought in against me at Judgment that *I* blowed hot an' cold, whatever some of us may have done."

"That's right," admitted Nathaniel Tapp. "'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.' You'm right in your practice; but 'tis a pity you say the wilful things you do. They won't be forgotten an' they won't help your eternal comfort, I promise you."

"We know you for a very steadfast man, Joshua, an' your bark be worse than your bite," said Mr. Westaway in a soothing voice. "For that matter, we all have our troubles, though we don't advertise them so loud as you. Take me. Only yesterday I lost a sovereign. Four I had in a bag put away, an' coming for to count 'em an' take one out, be gormed if I didn't find but three! 'Tis a terrible awkward thing, for there's only the family at my place, an' widow Haycraft, an' the boy Paul Lethbridge. The old woman it certainly ban't, so there's only the lad left; an' to-morrow I be going to make the Book an' key trial. It may be old-fashioned, but so's the Bible's self, for that matter, an' I've never known the one or t'other fail in proper hands."

Mr. Pearn was much interested.

"There's more in them old, solemn customs than this generation likes to allow," he said.

"So there be, Ned," agreed Tapp; "an' I'm glad you be going to do it, Joseph Westaway; an' by your leave I'll walk over to-morrow evening an' see it work, if you've no objection."



"Come an' welcome; but I hope 'twon't work, all the same, for 'twould break my heart to find that nice boy a thief."

Closing time was near and the men began to separate. Anthony Redvers and Mr. Tapp helped flock-master Westaway up the hill homeward; and as he went, the old man loudly mourned Joshua Bloom's outrageous sentiments. He did not tell them that at the door of the public-house, under cover of darkness, he had given Bloom a shilling to buy comfort for the quarryman's sisters.

Meantime Jesse Redvers and his brother Michael were sitting together in the low-ceiled and whitewashed kitchen at Harter. Jesse lolled by the peat fire, with his hands in his pockets and a pipe in his mouth. He preserved silence and was busy with thoughts of Salome Westaway. His brother sat at the table under a little paraffin lamp of white, opaque glass. He hummed to himself and mended a whip with cobbler's wax and twine. On the other side of the table Mrs. Tapp darned her husband's stockings.

Jesse yawned, blew down the stem of his pipe and stretched for an old mustard-tin on the mantelpiece. A good sheaf of feathers was kept there for pipe-cleaning. Then Michael spoke.

"Thank the Lord, mother's coming home again o' Monday."

"Ess, indeed; 'tis like a corpse in the house without her," said Mrs. Tapp.

"My father be nought when she's away — have 'e noticed that, Sarah?" asked Michael.

"Nought at all — just a man without a headpiece. Can't kill his spare time seemingly."

"'Tis the intellects of my mother," declared Michael.

"They lift her above all of us. For my part, I never hope to see such another woman for cleverness. Always right. Faither would be but a broken reed without her."

Jesse was nettled at these sentiments.

"That's foolishness," he said. "I'm not telling a word against our mother, for she'm all you say an' more too—wiser far than the run of women, an' watchful for faither, an' a saint of God, if you like. All the same, when it comes to intellect, a man's stronger than a woman. Faither's a very clever man, indeed, an' his cleverness can be seen in this—that he hasn't got an enemy. No man's fool enough to quarrel with him."

"Because there's nought to quarrel with," retorted Michael. "I love faither well enough—so well as you love mother, anyway—but I ban't blind, an' I stick steadfast to it that mother's cleverer than him, an' stronger minded too."

"That shows you're prejudiced. I don't say it unkindly, but prejudiced you certainly are against him. You think like mother, an' see life through her eyes always; but you haven't got her breadth of mind. What did she marry for? Because she saw a stronger nature in him—a nature she could trust an' rely upon."

Michael made an inarticulate sound in the nature of a snort.

"My mother never would have married any man with a will stronger than her own. She've said so herself to me."

"Then she didn't ought to have said so to you. 'Twas not a confidence for a son—true or untrue."

"If you be going to speak anything against my mother, Jesse, don't do it afore me, for I'll hear no word against her from anybody living. I know her

better than you, because I love her better — better far. An' she loves me better than she do you, because I understand her bigness of mind. You'm jealous, else you'd never dare to whisper one thought against her, let alone harbour it."

"How young you be!" said Jesse coldly. "I feel sometimes as if you was hardly breeched, though there's but two years between us. Do you think I mind my mother's loving you best? Why, 'tis the natural an' proper thing. You're her very own to your heart's core. You've got father's fair skin an' big bones, but the rest of you be all mother. An' my understanding comes from father."

"Mother don't know where your understanding comes from," answered the angry Michael. "She's said — afore your face, for that matter — that you was a changeling."

"I know it. That showed she wasn't so clever as you think her. I'm no changeling — no more than you be. Father understands me."

"If he do, you'm about the only thing he does understand!"

"You're a wicked rascal to say that; but you'll not anger me with your nonsense, try as you like. I see your game; you want to drive me away from Harter altogether, so that in the future you and not I shall be head of the farm. Well, it may happen that way. I've got ideas, thank God, an' they stretch outside this desert."

Michael jumped up, flung down his whip and protested passionately.

"Jesse — Jesse — you'll drive me mad with your cruel tongue. Ban't you my elder brother? Don't I know you'm far cleverer than me? Don't I want to look up to you an' respect you all I can? God

knows I never thought of such a thing — never — never. How could you say it?"

"Then I'm sorry," answered the elder instantly. "I'd no right to say it; and I won't think it either. You angered me; and if a man says a hard word to me, he generally gets a harder one back. Forgive me, Michael. We're fools to quarrel; but I've got private troubles and they will out. Anyway, the fault was shared and I apologise for my part."

Michael nodded and picked up his whip.

"I'm sorry too — very sorry," he said.

"You don't understand each other — you boys — not when your mother's away," declared Mrs. Tapp slowly. "She's the link that knits all together here."

"That's true — never you said truer," answered the younger son.

Nobody spoke again, and then, after twenty minutes of silence, a dog barked out of the night, while the great, cheerful voice of Mr. Redvers bade it rest.

"Father and Nat," said Jesse. He rose and went to the door.

Michael spoke to Mrs. Tapp and laughed as he did so.

"There won't be much more tramping off to the 'Hearty Welcome' after next Monday, I reckon."

The old woman assented.

"No, there won't. But 'twas your faither over-persuaded Tapp, I'm thinking, for a man less given to liquor an' lively conversation don't live."

## CHAPTER V

### THE BOOK AND THE KEY

UPON the following evening, in happy ignorance of the ordeal his honesty was to endure, the boy Paul Lethbridge marched off into Okehampton upon an errand, and the family at Watchett Hill Farm, under Mr. Westaway's direction, made proof of his suspected crime.

"It's a painful thing to doubt a fellow-creature—even a boy," said the farmer; "an' what makes it worse is that he has never to my knowledge lied afore. But the pound's gone out of the bag, an' it couldn't do that without hands. Mrs. Haycraft here be one of ourselves. Our good's her good, an' our trouble's her trouble. She'd no more take it than one of the chimney-pots. Therefore there's only Paul. I don't keep my desk locked as I should, so the temptation fell in his way."

"What business had he to go nigh your desk?" asked Barbara, who did not like Paul.

"None, of course. Ah, here's Mr. Tapp! Come in, Nathaniel; an' you get the family Bible from my bedroom, will 'e, Salome? An' you fetch the key from inside the front door, Mrs. Haycraft, please. Then us can carry the thing through in a proper spirit."

The farm parlour was unusually poor and mean, yet decoration of a sort it boasted; and by an odd chance the prints upon the wall possessed a sort of significance

in connection with this pending trial of youth. Like blots on the faded pattern of the paper there hung two Old Testament illustrations. Varnish had flaked off their wooden frames; worms had gnawed the margins of the engravings but left the pictures themselves untouched. Beneath each work a legend told that "Mac-murrough pinxit, James Godby sculpsit and John Murphy excudit" in 1799. The first picture showed how a serving-man had just discovered Joseph's cup in Benjamin's sack. Sneering camels and mail-clad soldiery filled the background, while the elder brothers stared in horror and the child stood in the midst and protested his innocence. The second picture displayed Joseph receiving his brethren. He wore a wonderful turban with an aigrette, and his bearded face was gentle and womanly. Round about stood strange, large-eyed figures listening to Judah, who pleaded with Joseph on behalf of the little boy.

Mr. Westaway's Bible was opened at the fiftieth Psalm and the big key of the front door so placed between the pages that its wards rested on the eighteenth verse.

"Now to set down his name," said Mr. Tapp; whereupon Salome took a piece of paper, wrote 'Paul Lethbridge' upon it, and placed the slip beside the key in the Bible.

"Next us wants two garters," declared Nathaniel, "an' they must be took off the left leg, mind, not the right. Them as provides the garters have to do the rest; and they must be without any feeling against the boy, else their malice would upset the charm. Mine will do for one, since I wish the lad nothing but good."

Mr. Tapp pulled up his trouser-leg and revealed a thick worsted stocking strapped with leather below his knee.

"Now for another," he said.

"I don't wear 'em," explained Mr. Westaway.  
"But one of you girls——"

"Mine ban't no good, for I don't like the little toad an' never have done, since I caught un strubbing a gladdy's nest," owned Barbara frankly.

"Here's my garter then," said Salome. "I don't care a button for the boy one way or t'other; an' what's more, I don't think he took the money. He's not that sort."

"We'll see," answered her father. "I hope, I'm sure, there's no stain in him; but if he didn't, 'twould puzzle the Dowl to say who did."

The Bible was shut and the two garters tied firmly round it. Then Salome and Mr. Tapp placed the forefingers of their right hands under the bow of the key.

"Now you've got to repeat together the eighteenth verse of the fiftieth Psalm very slow an' solemn," said the flock-master; "an' if the key do move either to right or left, then 'twas Paul took my money; and if it don't, he'm innocent."

Nathaniel repeated the significant verse twice to refresh the girl's memory; then they rehearsed the words together, and her small voice, blending with his deep, harsh organ, sounded like the music of a robin heard through thunder.

*"When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers."*

A tense silence followed, after which Tapp removed his hand, shook his head and sighed.

"It moved," he said; "it worked to the right."

"It certainly did move," murmured Salome; "but I thought 'twas to the left."

"Left or right, 'tis all one," said Mr. Westaway; "an' sorry enough I am for his mother's a widow an'

very ill to do. 'Tis a terrible thing for the rich to put another burden on the poor."

"I wonder what on earth he done with it," mused Barbara.

"'Tis all rummage an' nonsense," answered her sister. "Look in Paul's silly, honest eyes. I won't believe it."

Mrs. Haycraft began to cry and Mr. Tapp unbuckled his garter.

"A man of your large heart ban't likely to ruin him," he said. "It ban't for me to advise. Anyway, 'tis a sign of God's goodness an' mercy when He lets a sinner be caught early. He haven't thrown over Paul Lethbridge yet by the looks of it; therefore there's no reason why you should."

"I'll think upon it," answered Mr. Westaway; "an' I'm much obliged to you, Nat. I'll ax you to say nothing till I've decided."

Mr. Tapp rose to depart.

"Not a word — no business of mine. Only don't be too easy, Joseph. We all know how soft you are. Remember the boy's soul's at stake. Don't spare his hide, for his neck may suffer if you do. Many have come to the gallows through being let off too light by parents and guardians in their youth. Good night, Barbara, good night, Mrs. Haycraft."

Salome had left the room, so the guest could not bid her farewell.

Soon the women went to bed, and Mr. Westaway remained to welcome erring Paul. The old man puffed and blew and hammered his chin according to his custom before an unpleasant duty; then Lethbridge arrived and gave his master an immediate opportunity to approach the subject.

Paul was fourteen, and at present lacked particular



character or special attributes other than those common to a single-hearted and slow-witted boy. He looked up from a chair where he sat in the kitchen and took off his boots.

"Might I have a little bit of that figgy pudden as went out from supper, please? I be that leery, I could eat a frog."

"No, you may not have no figgy pudden, nor any other sort of pudden," answered the farmer between great snorts; for he blew on his indignation with his lungs for bellows. "Not a bite. You'm a wicked young shaver, an' the wonder is you was allowed to be born. But a good mother as ever breathed, an' a father well thought upon during his lifetime. Yet you could take my money."

The boy turned white, then fiery red. For a moment his jaw dropped and his eyes grew round. But he braced himself before this tremendous indictment and set his teeth. The shock was severe and kept him dumb awhile. At last he spoke.

"Me touch your pound! I'll swear afore the whole Bible I didn't. I've never took a blade o' grass from you in my life. I've always stuck up for you an' said there weren't such another kind master on the airth."

"Sorry I am," returned old Westaway; "but truth's truth, an' I can't believe your word against a wise, ancient ceremony. There—if they haven't left the key! We tried you, Paul, in proper fashion by the eighteenth of Psalm fifty; an' the key moved."

"I don't care for no keys an' no Psalms neither," answered the boy, "nor ten thousand Bibles neither. I didn't take it; an' if I was on my death-bed with the Dowl waiting, I'd say the same."

Mr. Westaway puffed and hit his chin.

"Well, it's all in a nutshell," he said. "I ban't

going to believe you; an' I ban't going to argue neither. You've got to pay me back that pound out of your wages, an' take a tremenjous flogging, or else you go off to-morrow without a character. I'm a just man, an' I don't want to ruin your future career, I'm sure. As one of the strong, I've always been merciful to the weak; an' you've been a very good lad till now, so I let you have this choice of evils. 'Twould be much easier for me to send you going, for I'm too old to do violent deeds, an' if I thrash you, I shall feel it in my breathing for a week. Still, I'll do it out of respect to your dead father. So make up your mind."

The boy's slow intelligence for once worked quickly. This was his first large experience of the ways of life. He had not taken the money; but he perceived the powers above him were agreed that he was a thief.

"How many think as I had that bit o' gold?" he asked.

"I won't deceive you: five in all — no, four, strictly speaking, for my youngest darter don't credit it. That leaves me, an' Barbara, an' Mrs. Haycraft, an' Mr. Tapp. But we shall all be dumb."

Paul argued painfully with himself. In one case a few persons would believe him dishonest, and by the payment of a pound and the suffering of a flogging he would stop at Watchett Hill. The alternative meant that he must go back to his mother, lose his employment and stand disgraced before the world.

"Beat me so soon as you've a mind to," he said; "an' I'll pay ninepence a week; an' I'll pray to God twice every day of my life, as you'll be showed afore you die that I never touched your money."

"That'll do very well," answered the old man. "Though I wish you'd confess, for 'twould be much

pleasanter an' comfortabler to my nature. But since you won't, you won't. Come in the wash-house an' keep so quiet as your flesh will let 'e. I'd gladly have paid thirty shillings at least for this not to have falled out."

His mind's great turmoil was armour against physical pain, and Paul took the beating in silence, then without word or tear, went off to his attic. His heart throbbed and a wild fury against life got hold upon him.

"Rheumatism, sure as death, to-morrow; an' boys have hanged themselves for less," reflected the flock-master gloomily, as he mopped his forehead and rubbed his right biceps and fore-arm. Presently he picked up the family Bible and tucked it under his arm without his usual ceremony. He even experienced a certain vague feeling of unfriendliness towards it, and he blamed himself for so doing as he went to bed. With his coat and waistcoat off he remembered that he had drunk nothing since supper, and now, wearied by such unusual activity, his stomach called for alcohol. Then it was that, returning to the kitchen and fumbling with his matches, he upset a brass candlestick upon the mantelshelf and revealed beneath it a little pile of silver coins.

The effect of this discovery upon the old man was very remarkable. The money first awakened his fading memory; then it loosened his tongue.

"Dallybuttons! if that don't beat anything!" he said aloud; then, going into the stone-paved passage, he shouted with all his might to the sleeping household.

"Barbara! Sally! Mrs. Haycraft! Paul Lethbridge! All of 'e! All of 'e!—come down house this instant moment. Quick! Quick, I say!"

A muffled voice cried, "Fire! 'Tis fire, I know it is," and the farmer bawled back :

"Ban't fire, but something worse. Quick — the pack of 'e! Wrong's been done, an' nobody under this roof shall sleep another wink till 'tis put right."

Salome came first — a beautiful figure carelessly arrayed from bed. A chintz gown hung loosely open over her nightdress, her hair fell in two long plaits, and her pretty feet were bare. Barbara followed. She had taken more pains to conceal her person and her head was muffled up in a shawl. Then Mrs. Haycraft and the boy arrived together. The old woman was wrapped in a red blanket, her nightcap had fallen back over her bald head and she carried a little wooden desk containing her treasures. She held her nose in the air and sniffed for fire, like a sporting dog that scents game. Paul had pulled his trousers over his nightshirt and at this moment a thought of thankfulness was in his mind: that he had shed no tear, now to be discovered.

"Listen to an ancient fool," said Mr. Westaway, "a silly, gnat-brained old piece as ought to be ashamed of his head — an' is, for that matter. I took that there pound! I took it last market-day an' made up my mind I wouldn't change it. But change it I did, an' my brain forgot as I'd done so, but only remembered that I'd not meant to. I spent nine-an'-six to Okehampton for a birthday present for Barbara, who comes twenty-nine next week; an' I've just found the change under this candlestick. But thank God, I'm a man as never minds being in the wrong, an' I'll up an' own a thousand times a day I'm a sinner, as we all should; an' I tell this young youth afore the company that I'm sorry to the heart I misjudged him so bad. I shan't sleep for it — not a wink. In fairness, Leth-

bridge, I must say as the key moved, an' Sally an' Nat Tapp both felt it do so. Still, you be innocent as the unborn, an' I'm awful sorry for my hard words an' hard knocks."

The lad looked at once jubilant and uncomfortable.

"I'm very glad you remembered, master," he said. "I wouldn't touch nought of yours for the whole world."

"You silly old lamb!" said Barbara to her parent; "an' I axed you a dozen times to let my day pass! Us don't want to be reminded of it at my time of life."

"Can the Lard's Book be out in such a matter as that there boy's eternal welfare?" asked Mrs. Haycraft with her eyes grown full of wonder under her little wrinkled forehead.

"'Tis too late in the evening to go into that," answered Mr. Westaway uneasily. "'Twasn't the Book's fault, you may take your oath. Us messed up the charm someways. Now you females go back to your rest, an' thank goodness the child's cleared."

Salome lingered a moment and spoke kindly to Paul.

"I'm truly glad," she said, "for you, and for your mother too."

He looked at her shyly, not ignorant of her loveliness even in this great moment.

"Thank you, miss," he answered. "An' thank you for not thinking I'd done it. I'll never forget that. 'Twill be a gert joy to mother to hear tell about it now."

"All the same, if you're wise, you'll say nothing," answered she. "There's nought like silence. Better forget to-night."

Salome departed, and after she was gone, Mr. Westaway beckoned Paul.

"Go to the larder," he said, when the women were out of ear-shot, "an' fetch in that beefsteak pie as you'll find there. An' bring the figgy pudden too. An' I'll draw a jug of cider for 'e."

Presently the old man returned, mixed a glass of gin and water for himself and sat and watched young Lethbridge make a very handsome supper.

"You'm a brave boy, an' I respect you for it; an' when you see my memory going here an' there, don't you fear to jog it, else worse may happen. Them with power in their hands can't be too careful."

Paul nodded, for his mouth was full. He ate heartily; then the cider loosened his emotions and, much to his own surprise, he began to cry. He screwed up his mouth hard, but the tears would fall. Then the sleeve of his jacket went up.

"There — there — 'tis all right now," said his master. "You'm innocent afore the world. 'Tis me that ought to holler, not you."

"I be per-perfectly happy about it," answered the boy stolidly. "I can't tell why for I be crying. I don't want to."

"'Tis the gert excitement on a full stomach," answered Mr. Westaway. "Now list to me." He looked nervously towards the door, then continued in a hurried whisper. "I be going to raise your wages, my son. So all's well that ends well. Money's plaguey tight, but I'd sooner stop it out of my baccy than you shouldn't have it. Anyway, a shilling a week goes on to your wages next Monday; an' — since 'tis a vartuous act in me to better you — I feel very little doubt but that the Lard'll find the money for 'e, even if I can't. Up to the present time I've trusted Him in high affairs — which always mean money at bottom — an' yet here I am still. An' the A'mighty have got

a better memory than me; so you may cheer up — eh?"

"I be very cheerful indeed," said Paul; "an' I'll always work so hard as a horse for 'e; an' I'll go to bed now, if you please."

"Do, my dear; an' I must look round for thicky birthday gift for my darter. 'Twas a little old funny brooch, made of Irish bog oak, they told me. I brought un back all right; but be blessed if I know from Adam where I've put un."

## CHAPTER VI

### ANN RETURNS HOME

ON a day in late June, Ann Redvers made journey homewards. Her mother had regained health and the wife was free. She glanced out of the railway carriage with a farmer's eyes and marked the sheep in one field, the cattle in another, the promise of hay harvest in a third. She pursed her lips at the futility of some operations, nodded approvingly when wise husbandry met her gaze and bustle succeeded on stagnation.

She was a woman of forty, with a tall figure and almost stately bearing. Her features were clean-cut, hard and more than handsome. Steadfast brown eyes, a strongly modelled mouth, with lips too thin and a chin somewhat heavy for a woman, marked her countenance; but it was a noble one. The sweetness and freshness of health distinguished her clear brown skin and abundant hair. She scarcely looked her age, though a dark woman; but now, alone in thought, an atmosphere of well-being and even a rare touch of gentleness sat happily upon her. She fell into reflection, and her haughtiness of demeanour did not so much appear while memory thus held her in a dream.

Returning into married life after an absence of two months, Ann Redvers grew retrospective, and, by freak of chance, as the unconscious prelude to her life's climax, reviewed the past twenty years and reflected



upon her husband. Towards him this separation had awakened a little softness. She retraced the days of their courtship and permitted her mind to dwell upon them. She remembered the spot in Halstock Glen where she had said 'yes' to him.

The birth of her boys returned to her mind; and the death of Anthony's father. Then she became mistress of Harter Farm. The strenuous, not unprosperous years passed before her. She had saved nearly a thousand pounds by self-denial and industry. A passing complacence crossed her mind, but she dismissed it instantly. Her custom, when accidents of good fortune entered her thoughts, was to cast them out quickly and conjure up less pleasant recollections or aspects of life; for she regarded it as mental and moral discipline so to do. Ann Redvers turned to her own faults of temper and impatience, and mourned them. She loved her husband, yet how often was she short and sharp with him; how often did she turn a cold cheek to his caresses; how often his uxorious ardour had brought down reproofs that sent him shamefaced away from her. She set herself to magnify Anthony's virtues. He was good-hearted, true, simple, and she had no reason to be impatient with him. She would learn to be a little more yielding, a little more tolerant of his pleasures. Her solitary, stern jest with neighbours was always the same: 'Well, I must be getting home to look after my three boys.' She had said this hundreds of times, and Belstone folks always laughed respectfully out of courtesy to her. Now she determined nevermore to utter it. The joke was not seemly. She would endeavour to strengthen Anthony's self-respect and render him a more dignified object. This ambition was very worthy; yet she knew that to do the thing would be difficult.

Ann passed presently from his good qualities to his good looks and dwelt upon them; then she turned to his virtues again. He never quarrelled with her; he never questioned her judgment; he remembered her slightest wish. He was before all things loyal, and oftentimes she had heard how behind her back he had given her more than credit for her manifold wisdom.

Her heart warmed towards Anthony. It seemed that the gradual and creeping incrustations of twenty years were falling away from their united life after this unusual separation. She reflected upon his attitude towards these ideas; she wondered if this transitory mood would hold with her, and she asked herself whether she might presently speak to him as she was now thinking of him. Such sentiments would set him frisking round her and hugging her. She must not spoil him, but suffer her intentions to appear gradually. He should have a little more pleasure; he should be merry sometimes without a frown from her. He should even go to a revel now and again, or the neighbouring horse and cattle shows. She herself might sometimes make holiday, on a public holiday, and add to his pleasure by accompanying him.

These ideal resolves touched Ann Redvers to a most rare emotion. She wondered whether her husband would come to the station to meet her. That her son Michael would do so, she did not doubt. Then she remembered how the market-cart could hold but two with her box, and so waited patiently and knew that Michael's ruddy face would be the one to welcome her at Okehampton. For a moment Ann's thoughts rested on her elder son also, and she recollected that he had not once been to see her during her absence from home. His mother dismissed Jesse impatiently

from her mind. He was the only thing in her life too difficult for her.

Turning from the window, Mrs. Redvers lowered her eyes to the floor of the carriage and gazed idly at some scraps of paper there. The fragments were small and much scattered. Most of them appeared to lie far back under the opposite seat of the carriage, and she regarded them with no sort of interest, for her mind was not upon them. At Ashbury a puff of wind blew some of these pieces towards Ann. Then a labourer, who had opened the door, shut it again, on finding that the carriage was not reserved for smokers, and Mrs. Redvers travelled onward alone.

Now, regarding the points of her boots, her eyes fell upon one piece of this paper and she observed two capital letters upon it. The train ran up and down between Holsworthy and Okehampton. Doubtless, therefore, somebody from the latter place had read this letter or memorandum, then torn it up and flung it here. Mrs. Redvers bent and stared. The initial letters belonged to her husband. Moreover, they had actually been written by him, for well she knew the sprawling hand with its sanguine slope upward. She tried to recollect who had left the train as it entered Holsworthy, but could not do so, though she remembered that this carriage had drawn up opposite to her. Doubtless the recipient of the letter alighted at an intermediate station.

The circumstance of initials only caused Mrs. Redvers to wonder. Her husband always signed any ordinary business communication with his full name. This note, then, must have been of a familiar sort and written to some friend, who knew the writing and did not need a name. To his wife's knowledge Anthony claimed no such friend at Okehampton. He seldom

put pen to paper at all, and was well pleased that Ann should conduct all correspondence. Yet here lay the remains of a private letter from him; and accident had thus thrown them at his wife's feet.

She smiled to think of her shiftless mate conducting a correspondence single-handed; then an idea occurred to her: she would astonish him with the knowledge of this letter. Ann gathered up the pieces and was about to set them together, when the train rumbled over a viaduct and she knew that her destination was at hand. Therefore she collected the torn paper carefully and tied it all together in the corner of her pocket-handkerchief.

That any letter from Anthony Redvers could contain a message not for her eye, never struck even as a shadow upon his wife's mind. The proposition that he might take steps unconcerted with her, must have filled Ann with mere amusement. He trusted her judgment and decision for everything in his world. He owned not a thought hidden from her, scarcely a desire she did not know, never an ambition that she had not fired or cooled. Ann supposed that she comprehended her husband absolutely; and that there lurked a risk in the perusal of this letter, she did not dream. She picked it up, as we pick up the laboured page of a little child, who has perchance been bidden to acknowledge some act of kindness, and who, protesting, writes in round hand his ungracious gratitude.

Her intent now was humorously mischievous. She smiled as she gathered up the paper; her stern face broke into happiness; even laughter hovered about her eyes for a moment, when she thought how her omniscience would amaze Anthony anon. 'I'll make it out in secret,' she said to herself; 'an' just talk about it as a matter of course that I have known all along.'

The train stopped, and Michael's mop of sandy hair, red face and grinning mouth were at the window instantly. He helped her to alight, then kissed her on both cheeks with a fine indifference to the life about him. Soon they were driving home, and the joyful boy chattered and babbled and laughed, as though he had been to meet a sweetheart rather than a mother. She listened to the last news, to the politics of Belstone, to the particulars of the new guns, to the operations upon the Moor and the life of the home.

"Mr. Arscott's lent old Westaway three hundred pound; an' Bessie Medland's going to take young Tucker—as you always said she would do; an' Bloom, an' a good few besides, have lost all their early potatoes along of them late frosts," said Michael.

"What about ours?" asked his mother.

"We're all right—'pon our high ground. They wasn't showing when the frost fell. Now they'm making nice stuggy growth. Never looked better."

The cart stopped many times on its way through Belstone, for every man and woman who saw her came forward to pay their respects and welcome Mrs. Redvers home again. Folk lost no opportunity to be civil, though they hoped nothing from such courtesy. She commanded it.

Then, on the top of Watchett Hill, at a point whence distant Harter, with its three splashes of colour, came into sight, Redvers met the cart, turned Michael out, leapt beside his wife and pressed her to his great breast with a hug.

Anthony found Ann most gracious, and from a tentative kiss or two, he took fire and rubbed his face against her brown cheek till a lovely carmine flushed it.

"There—there—you silly man—you'll kiss my head off! Just look at 'Spider'! If the dog ban't

so glad to see me as any of 'e! Now, take your hands away an' let me stare at Harter."

She drew down her dark brows to focus the three specks of light. Then, though her forehead frowned, her lips smiled. The sharp, familiar air of Dartmoor touched her face like a friend, and she welcomed its cold kiss as readily as her husband's hot ones. She breathed deeply and felt the air of the sick chamber driven from her lungs.

"'Tis good to be back. But, Lord, how much to do! I'm longing to be at it."

"Everything's in apple-pie order, I'm sure," declared Anthony. "Mrs. Tapp have been up at cock-light this week past, an' us all lent a hand. You never went through a properer spring cleaning yourself than what we have."

Mrs. Redvers smiled. In her mind were various tests to prove this assertion. They would be applied before she was at home an hour.

"Where's Jesse?" she asked.

"He went off after range-clearing to get a dish of trout for 'e."

Even the roar and rattle of the guns was pleasant to Ann Redvers, for they bellowed 'home.' Long brown snakes were creeping up the side of Rough Tor—a mile from Harter—and beneath them stood a white spot where an ambulance waggon waited beneath the firing point. Then cannon spurted fire and woke the echoes, while far away great shells burst in the air and poured down lead upon the peaty bosom of the Moor. Their rounds discharged, each battery would limber up and curl away homeward to the lines, while others suddenly appeared and crept forward to take their turn.

Soon Mrs. Redvers was in her own kitchen again,

and Jesse looked up from a frying-pan to kiss her and utter his welcome.

"I seed 'e coming, mother, so I set to work. They'll be just ready for you by the time you are ready for them."

She thanked him and directed Michael to carry her trunk upstairs.

"An' mind the turn at the corner, my dear; for if that tin box touches, 'twill leave an ugly mark we'm better without."

Half an hour later Mrs. Redvers came down to dinner. She had changed her gown and now wore a clean, pale pink print dress whose simplicity showed her stature and noble figure. But Ann's frame of mind was also changed, to the regret of the household. A humour amazingly light and merry for her had vanished with her second-best gown, and, in its place, was the familiar mode: quick, short and apprehensive. Yet something more than this now marked her manner. She entertained thoughts that none were invited to share. Her replies were often from the purpose and her appetite was bad.

Mr. Redvers expressed lively concern.

"My life! this won't do at all," he said. "'Tis time, an' more'n time, that you was home again."

"Time, an' more'n time, as you say, father," she answered.

Presently she turned to Michael and showed a deliberate coolness to the others that hurt her husband, but left Jesse indifferent.

The man fumed a little; then, as soon as he had finished his dinner, he rose and marched off. Jesse followed him out of doors, and, seeing the lad, his father spoke.

"What's happened now? Did 'e mark what vexed

her? No word of mine, I trust? Your dear mother was like an angel from heaven half an hour ago; now——”

“I didn’t notice anything particular. Mother’s herself, I suppose. ’Tis being out of touch. She’s full of thoughts what to do first; an’ what to undo, that us have done to please her.”

“Don’t talk so bitter as that. ’Tis natural, an’ to be expected, as she should be unrestful at first. Her quick eye sees so much more than any of us can. Yet ’tis frosty work after we’ve took so much trouble—specially as we was all so warm an’ loving a minute ago.”

Mr. Redvers whistled mournfully; then he felt ashamed of his momentary irritation and went indoors again, to obey any orders that his wife might be pleased to issue.



## CHAPTER VII

### VARIOUS PROBLEMS

A LETTER, nine words long, had changed Ann's mood. The task of putting together her husband's note proved easy. It was written on a half sheet of paper and no evidence of an envelope appeared among the collected scraps.

Thus Anthony had written:—

*Thursday night at the broom patch on Halstock Hill.*

*A. R.*

Mrs. Redvers found no immediate annoyance mixed with her astonishment before this message. That her husband should so far exhibit originality as to plan a secret and nocturnal meeting with anybody much amazed her. The broom patch on Halstock Hill was a lonely region, removed from all dwellings, and only come at by climbing. A sheep-track or two wound round about it, but none frequented the place save wandering herds, or the ponies, or a chance boy seeking for birds' nests. Across the deep gorge of Oke the broom patch shone at this season, in a mass of colour paler than the gorse. Above it the hills arose, and beneath, the river glittered over sloping ledges of granite.

Here Anthony had arranged to meet a man from Okehampton—so his wife assumed. That it might be a woman did not even occur to her. Despite his

handsome face and weakness where the sex was concerned, Ann Redvers had never in her life suffered one prick of jealousy. Upon the whole, she esteemed Anthony too slightly to mistrust him. His nature did not embrace sufficient enterprise or energy to lead him elsewhere. It was his lack of power more than his strength of principle that made her easy and perfectly secure.

She saw no shadow of personal affront in this matter, until she had read the letter three times with intervals of reflection between. At last, attempting a theory of it, she suspected that Anthony must have presumed on her absence to take thought for the farm and embark upon some design of which she knew nothing. The idea obscured her cheerfulness and she grew cloudy. She was hurt that he could attempt such a thing. Her recent determinations melted away, yet she made an effort to restrain them. A fancy came to her that perhaps he had plotted some achievement, and would presently appeal for praise, in his boyish fashion, when the secret was out. But previous schemes of this kind had failed. Instead of commendation, most of Anthony's single-handed efforts for the good of Harter had won her disapproval and left him balked and disappointed. Therefore it seemed unlikely that he had planned any further surprise. The alternative supposition made Ann sit down with a gasp. Could it be that he actually had some concern in hand of which she was to know nothing? But experience extending over twenty years soon calmed her. Every probability cried out against such a circumstance. She assured herself that he only waited for the night to tell her all; and the belief comforted her mind, though it failed to brighten her spirits. She left the matter thus, and banished it from thought as much as possible, until

opportunity offered for private speech with her husband.

But she locked up the letter.

Night brought enthusiastic confidences from Mr. Redvers, and countless protestations of his joy at Ann's return. It seemed that he bared his very heart for her, and the humility of his affection touched her transiently. His love was the master-spirit of the man, the best he had to offer; but he never lost sight of his unworthiness as contrasted with her unutterable worth.

Of the broom patch, however, Anthony said nothing, and many times was it on the wife's tongue to speak. Self-esteem silenced her, and she lay awake long after he slept.

Morning failed to lift the cloud, and it increased until her horizon was darkened. Redvers had gone to the ranges when Ann woke. She looked at the letter again, then seriously set herself the task of deciding between three lines of action. To destroy the note and ignore it was her first determination; to speak to Anthony, the second; to keep the appointment at the broom patch and, unseen, witness this secret and mysterious meeting, occurred to her as a third course. Her nature inclined to the first plan; but circumstances made her consider the last. For this affair had caused her tribulation of a minor sort; and to suppose that she could forget it, or that she could lower herself to beg for particulars, seemed alike impossible. To ask for the truth appeared a confession of weakness; to tell her husband the truth, after the event, was an action much more agreeable to her instincts. It had been his wife's first intention to astonish Redvers with her discovery; but his letter merely introduced Ann to the threshold of unknown

facts; and the astonishment remained with her. To ask him the nature of his appointment by night on Halstock Hill would doubtless surprise him, but show no domination in her; to tell him what actually happened in the broad light of the following day, and perhaps deny him knowledge of how she had gathered his secret — that, indeed, would be a manifestation of her superior wisdom and strength.

Without feeling unkindly to Anthony, she resented these hidden operations, for it looked not less than absurd that after their relations of twenty years, he should attempt to live any part of his life out of her sight. An effort so to do appeared in this letter, and she decided to destroy it in the bud.

Then, led thereto by that last thought, she asked herself whether this secret represented the beginning of some understanding, or the end, or the close and familiar midst. The question determined her own course, and she made up her mind to visit the broom patch at the appointed time.

Upon Wednesday morning she told her husband that she would take supper with a friend on the following night; and she marked him closely to note whether her information gave him pleasure or relief. He showed neither and answered indifferently. Redvers was chilled since his wife's return, for he did not know the secret of her gloom. She paid him little attention, and his castles in the air, lifted for her home-coming, were shattered.

Once or twice he grumbled to Jesse, but an instinct always kept him silent in his younger son's presence. He was jealous of Michael and never sought the boy's confidence nor offered him his own.

Jesse and his father walked after supper to Belstone, and Anthony expressed disquiet.

"Can't understand your dear mother since her comed back to us. Last night I wanted to talk particular and was full of chatter when us got to bed. But she cut me short, like a chopper falling. 'I want to think to-night,' she says. 'Doan't be telling, there's a good soul. Just let me bide quiet. I've got something on my mind.' 'If so,' I said, 'I did ought to share it.' 'Maybe you will — sooner than you reckon for,' she answered; an' not another word she said. I snorted an' tossed a bit, then went to sleep."

"If mother's got anything on her mind, you should know."

"Of course. What be I for but to take the fret an' rough edge of life off her shoulders? Though Lord knows it can't be done very easy with her. There's some folks be that greedy of trouble, they hate to halve it with anybody."

"I should have thought a woman didn't ought to keep secrets from her husband."

"Not secrets — no — her never would have no secrets, I'm sure of that. Any more than I — at least — well, to be plain, Jesse, us all have secrets. 'Tis part of human nature to have 'em, I believe."

The lad knew this sufficiently well. But he asked a question.

"Even between husbands and wives?"

"Why, yes — even between them. Perhaps the happiest be they that have fewest secrets; or it may be t'other way round, and the happiest be them that keep their secrets best — which is to say the happiest be the wisest. But secrets there must be; if 'tis only secrets of opinion."

"You'm so wise."

"I wish I was. But life's taught me a fact or two here an' there."

"You don't always think like mother. Wouldn't be in nature for a man always to think like a woman."

"She's a strong thinker," said Mr. Redvers, "an' I'm never too comfortable when she tells me she wants to think. After a thinking bout, dear mother ban't the best company till the wind have blowed through her mind a bit. She has the knack of making me feel such a poor thing—which I am, of course. But you are a very understanding boy an' see things with my eyes. Anyhow, I can confide like in you. That ban't to be disloyal to her neither. Only the Lord knows all she is to me—the light of my life. But you're a wonder, an' you understand me exactly, so that I can growl to you in an' out an' give you a friendly wink sometimes behind my dear woman's back. An' you don't mistake it. But I wouldn't wink at Michael when I'm catching it—not for gold. He'm all his mother. There ban't more than the point of a pin in him of my getting. He never has had patience with me, strange to say. He don't think very respectfully of me, an' that's a fact."

Jesse's heart warmed at this confession and he felt proud to be admitted into secret understanding with his parent.

"I know what a good, clever man you are, father. And you've got a deal more brain power than any of us really. And Michael's little better than a fool, for all mother thinks such a lot of him."

"No," replied Anthony. "I ban't good by a mighty long way—an easy, erring man am I; but I do my poor best for them I love. Michael's no fool—only young in years. A very solid build of chap. I care for him more'n he cares for me, because his mother looks out of his eyes, though them same eyes be the colour of mine. But I never was so close to

him as I am to you. You an' me be built of pretty much the same earth, though you have got her beautiful darkness of hair an' skin, an' her wisdom too."

Ten minutes later they entered the "Hearty Welcome," to find familiar faces and one unfamiliar in the atmosphere of Hannaford's bar.

"Hullo! William Arscott! Wonders never cease," cried Redvers.

"You come in the nick of time," answered the stone-merchant. "'Tis about the path-field up from Okehampton that I'm here. It have been free from years beyond memory. Even Joe Westaway can't call home a time when it was shut against folks. But there's no strict right of way, of course, though so long sanctioned to the public use by custom."

"Old Hockaday never thought to close it," said the flock-master, who was in his usual corner; "but since he's dead, that cross-grained son of his, with his radical ideas, has been sticking up a lot of scowling nonsense about trespassers, an' making a right down young fool of hisself."

"I know," answered Redvers; "but who cares a cuss for the fellow? I was over the path but yesterday; an' I see the boys have knocked down two of his notice-boards an' broke his hedge for him. That's all he'll get: sour looks, an' insults, an' nobody caring a button."

"That's very well so far as it goes," said Mr. Arscott; "but Okehampton don't understand him like Belstone do. And you mightn't have heard of his latest move. That's what I've come to talk about and take the opinion of the company on. My man, Joshua Bloom here, will tell 'e what happened to him this very morning."

Mr. Bloom nodded and dried his mouth.

"I've seen death since the dawn," he said. "That cranky young beast of a Hockaday have turned his gert Devon bull in the field. An' but for the blessing of God an' my own legs, I shouldn't be here now. The bull comed for me like a roaring tiger; an' I only got through the hedge wi' a inch of room between his horns an' my hinder parts; an' if I was a man of any mark, I'd have the law of him."

"That's the point," said Arscott. "Have you got a case? I doubt it. The meadow be his and there's nothing to keep him from putting ten bulls in it, if he pleases."

"Cold-blooded devil!" said Redvers. "To think poor old Josh here might be at the end of his troubles with a broken neck! I've half a mind to go off this instant moment an' give young Hockaday a damn good thrashing."

"I went down an' talked to him myself," said Bloom. "An' never did I find words come patter. I'll warn 'e I stung un! But words don't break no bones."

"The point is how to bring the man to his senses," declared Arscott; "if you've got any reason among you, let me hear it. Then I'll be off to parson and find out what he thinks."

Everybody uttered his opinion, but none could suggest anything practical, save that Joshua Bloom should have the law of young Hockaday. This course Mr. Bloom refused to follow.

"If I'd had but a finger broken, I'd have done it," he assured them; "but since I'm not scratched, there's nought to work upon. 'Tis just my luck. So like as not if the bull had but pricked me where it weren't of no consequence, I might have made a fi'pun note by it; but of course he missed me, though I did fall lumpus t'other side the hedge."



William Arscott stayed for an hour, listened to the sense and nonsense of the meeting, neither accepted nor offered drink, and then took his departure.

All men breathed freer for his absence.

"Phew!" said Hannaford, "what a dry chap! 'Tis like talking to a bit of his own wares. For that matter, he'm granite himself inside."

"Granite's a good-natured stone compared to that man," declared Bloom. "A chip of the old Arscott flint, he be. I began quarrelling with busy Billy's father in 1848 about my wages; an' it have gone on ever since. I'm the oldest hand in his employ, bar Pearn, an' he'm itching to be rids of me; for his mean game is to keep none but young uns, an' turn 'em off the moment they begin to be worth good money."

"All the same, he must have a few old hands to larn the boys," said Anthony.

"That's my only hold upon him."

"What you don't know about the ways of granite ban't worth knowing, I'm sure," said Mr. Westaway.

"True as gospel," answered Bloom. "Yet since the summer of '72 I've never had a rise. An' never will again. He'll lower me, or else sack me come presently. I've seed it in his eye for six months."

"You ought to be pensioned; an' if you was my man, you would be," declared Westaway.

"Pension your gran'mother! That's not his way. He wouldn't give me a lift in his spring cart to the workhouse without charging for it," answered Joshua.

"An' yet he have his feelings. There's things to his credit in a small way. Many a little boy or girl have had a sixpence from him — out of pure goodness — no other reason. An' he made no trouble in my business — was real glad to aid me," mused the older man.

"Mind you pay your interest — that's all," warned Bloom. "Let him have every farthing that's lawfully his — else you'll precious soon be a flock-master without any flock."

"There's no doubt he looks for punctual payment; but that's business. Nobody knows what business means better'n me. 'Tis wonnerful how even three hundred pound will vanish away, if you've outrun your means a trifle. Among friends I may mention that us have got to take the boots an' shoes out of the bread an' butter at Watchett Hill just now, owing to the trouble among the lambs; but next year will see us righted."

Everybody expressed a hope that it might be so.

"We must retrench," continued Mr. Westaway. "Dallybuttons! What wonnerful vartue there is in a word! Ever since I made use of that figure of speech, I've had a easier mind."

"The thing is to do it," ventured Mr. Hannaford.

"I am doing it. No waste where I be now. I've got a hawk's eye 'pon everything. Why, I'll snap the sugar-basin off the table so soon as look, if I think my maidens be making too free — ay, an' the teapot too! So keen as Arscott hisself very near. Have a drop with me, Mr. Redvers? 'Tis my turn to-night, I'm sure."

"You paid last time I was here," said Anthony. "Fill Mr. Westaway's glass, will 'e? An' how many more sovereigns have 'e lost from your bag, Joe?"

Everybody laughed.

"There — there — I've had enough of that tale," said the old man. "Us all makes our mistakes; an' weren't no lasting harm done. I made my amends, as the boy knows."

"Trust you for that! I lay he'd take all the thrash-

ings you could give him for the supper he got after — an' the rise of wages too."

"Well, well, I couldn't do less. 'Tis a sad thing for the memory to go weak. But I hope, neighbours, you'll make allowance for me, same as I do for all men. Life's nought but giving an' taking; an' everything in the world depends on how us do it."

"Right!" said Mr. Redvers. "If everybody done another a good turn every time a good turn was done to him, what a smooth business life would be — eh?"

Mr. Westaway nodded assent with his glass between his lips, but Joshua Bloom ridiculed the sentiment.

"Not it! That's against human nature. There's lots as finds a good turn like ropy cider — it gripes 'em."

"I be that sort myself," confessed Hannaford from behind the bar. "I never could stomach favours, an' I've never axed in my life for anything beyond justice."

"Which be the one thing you may take your oath you won't get," said Bloom. "Justice don't thrive in this world."

"If you axed for more, perhaps you'd get more," ventured Jesse timidly.

"No — no! I ax for nought an' thank for nought but one thing; an' that be sleep."

Nobody answered and Bloom turned suddenly to Jesse.

"But you — you'm young. Don't you listen to a sour old toad like me. You trust your fellow-creatures an' go on hoping to be happy. Don't fear to ax for what you want. There's no rule against axing. There's no rule anywhere, an' good an' bad's a toss up. You may pull a prize out of your life — or you may not.

Everything's run by chance, according to the plan of Providence. That drunken swine, Wade, to Okehampton, falled under the train t'other day an' come off with only an arm less; an' Doctor Wilson—a saint of God, as you might say—he was going to Mrs. Maybridge on the Moor, as was in child-bed, an' his hoss put foot in a rabbit hole, an' the man broke his neck afore you could look round. He died all alone; an' her child died; an' she ban't out of the wood; and God's looking sharp after every sparrow."

"His ways ban't our ways, an' 'tis idle to talk that stuff," said Anthony Redvers.

"I should hope His ways wasn't ours, else everything would be plain sailing, an' we should understand life an' all be on firm ground, an' become hard an' reckless, no doubt," said Mr. Westaway. "Why, if His will was as easy to understand as big print, an' a clear thing for every humble heart to follow, there'd be no need of learned men, nor your bishops, nor prebendaries, nor rural deans. 'Twould be taking the bread out of parson's mouth if we could understand the ways o' God."

"Do you reckon that clergymen do all the good they claim to do?" asked Jesse.

"More," declared Mr. Westaway. "Much more. They are the backbone of the nation. Without them all the mystery would be knocked out of religion, an' 'twould sink to be a matter of common sense. Dally-buttons! What a downfall 'twould be if us was allowed to run our lives by naked common sense. Away would go tithes an' all the other hidden things; an' not a man to marry us, nor christen our children, nor bury anybody."

"There ban't no common sense in tithes, an' that I'll swear to," said Hannaford.

"Well, I've always paid 'em," declared Westaway.

"An' you'll go that much quicker to the work-house," foretold Bloom.

Mr. Westaway shook his head. He was now half-way through his third tumbler of spirits. This usually rendered him highly philosophical; while the fourth and last left him sanguine and cheery.

"'Tis the difference between a stained glass window an' a clear one," he said. "A clear window be easiest to see through, I grant. But the church don't want you to see through her windows. The coloured glass catches the eye an' holds it tight. It softens the mind; 'tis a solemn thing, like the organs a-playing; an' lifts the soul to its Maker."

"All show an' noise," grumbled Joshua Bloom.

"An' even so, they work their proper ends—like parson's surplice do. There's a meaning in the very flutter of the man's sleeves to me. Who'd heed him if he stood among us in his forked breeches like a common week-day chap? For my part, I was sorry when he gived up the black preaching-gown. I've never felt the same bite to his discourses since. Anyhow, they've left me in an easier mind for Sunday dinner than they used to do."

"Ban't the gown; 'tis him," said Redvers. "He'm changing. My wife noted it afore she went from home. Tapp do grumble bitterly about it. Every year of his life parson do get more hopeful an' less down on sinners."

"His brain grows mellow, as becomes it," said Westaway.

"Over-ripe more like," growled Bloom. "Tapp be right there, though he's not often right. You'll never hear the reverend gentleman mention Hell now;

though I suppose 'tis just so hot a place as when he wore his black gown."

"We turn from it as we grow older," said the flock-master.

"An' get nearer," sneered Mr. Bloom.

"No doubt 'tis a properer thing for age to dwell on the Lard's wonnerful patience, rather than His righteous wrath," declared Anthony.

Jesse looked at Bloom, for in some sort he regarded this embittered spirit as a champion of liberty.

"Patience?—you say patience?" asked Joshua. "Well, an' what then? Ban't a very strange thing for the faither of a large family to be patient with his own, be it? Us be the Almighty's own invention; an' if He can't bear with us, who should?"

"We must turn Tapp on to you, Josh," declared Redvers, and Mr. Westaway entered upon his fourth glass.

"There's a lively rudeness of speech about you as don't become a faithful Christian, Joshua Bloom," he answered. "You don't bend under the yoke as you ought to, an' that's a fact, though we know you'm a God-fearing creature at heart."

A round-faced man in a constable's livery put his head in at the door.

"Church clock's just gone ten, souls," he said.

Mr. Hannaford poured out a little glass of sloe gin from a special bottle, and the officer took it without other acknowledgment than a nod.

"Fine growing weather," he remarked; and the conversation turned to hay.

But the night was over. In ten minutes Mr. Hannaford bolted his doors, while Anthony and Jesse each took an arm of farmer Westaway and assisted him to climb Watchett Hill.

"What a butivul moon!" said the old man, blinking amiably upon the risen planet.

"Full to-morrow night," answered Anthony Redvers.

"I marked it in *Old Moore's Almanac*."

## CHAPTER VIII

### 'WIDECOMBE FAIR'

UPON the bosom of Halstock Hill the approach of darkness was a thing magnificent, and dawn, a spectacle less solemn but not less splendid. Now, through the long hours of a June night, did Ann Redvers witness both.

Round about the broom patch extended eminences, far-flung slopes and tremendous declivities. Furze and bilberry, heath and the great brake-fern clothed this hill; and through their interwoven textures the granite broke in peaks, flattened slabs and shattered moraines, all mellowed to beauty by lichens and stone-crops and small, bright-eyed flowers that found root-hold in the riven stones.

A grassy knoll, sweet with wild thyme and wood-strawberries, spread out beneath the broom patch; and here the wife, returning from Belstone at edge of dusk, concealed herself behind a broken boundary. The ruined wall of earth and stone was tunnelled by rabbits; a few trees grew upon it, and a whitethorn lighted on-coming night and made the dewy hour fragrant. In a hollow, where young bracken lifted shining crooks and seeding grasses grew lush and high, Ann Redvers sat herself behind a young mountain ash and waited for her husband. Under a gentle June darkness, the broom patch gradually faded away and was folded up and obliterated in an even monochrome with the less brilliant habiliments of the hill.



Now, out of all this pearly gloom, the highest lights were the scuts of the coneys as they lopped hither and thither, leapt and frisked along, or sat upon the flat boulders and cleaned their faces. Manifestations of night multiplied around the woman, and despite a growing tension of mind, she had leisure curiously to note them. To be thus idle and alone in darkness was an experience very unfamiliar to her. Her busy days embraced few such moments as these. An owl passed by from Halstock Wood; a night-jar made the gathering gloom throb with his strange and solitary note. From far below, Oke river cried in a voice unlike her daily music.

Ann turned to the East where the Belstones stretched ragged to their skyline. They rose to peaks and turrets; they fell in wide concavities between their various tors. The brightness of the sky increased above them, until suddenly a million simultaneous points of light greeted the moon as she swam gently out from behind the uplifted earth and every dewdrop glittered welcome. Her pure transplendency dissolved the solid scarps and counterscarps of the hills; washed away their sharp outlines and mixed them with the lambent air. Nature laughed at the vanity of sense, and changed this mighty incarnation of heath and stone and rivers calling, to mere dream staple wrought upon summer night by the glimmering of mists, the irradiation of dews and the magic of the moon.

A sigh of content seemed audibly to break from Earth before this last expression of the hour. Light fell liquidly upon all things, save where, in the deep gorge of Oke, a shadow spread, like the sole palpable fabric in this scene, and the river cried beneath it, and pleaded for her share of the gentle beams.

Ann Redvers beheld these great phenomena, and

they woke within her a prick of humiliation. She appreciated, even to discomfort, her own littleness before this vision. Pain agitated her mind, when she reflected upon what errand she lurked here hidden. Before night's manifestations her enterprise sank to meanness; while the spirit that inhabited nature now dwarfed her fears, by magnifying the petty character of them. Her throat swelled, her pulse quickened, and she knew that these sensations were the physical expression of shame. As the moon rose, her heart rose also; as the sky grew very light and the great shadow beneath dwindled, until Oke flashed silvery along her ways, the watcher felt what until this time she had never felt. That solemn moment wakened possibilities unsuspected. A nobler purpose touched Ann even to emotion. Night rained in at all her senses, and she rose up suddenly and stood in the midst as a crown and fair culmination of that spectacle. The woman was beautiful so seen, for she, too, was touched by enchantment; and the sleight that made granite float cloudlike and softened mountains to radiant mist, that turned the croziers of the uncurling fern into living silver and the trembling fret of young leaves to a translucent light, translated Ann Redvers also. It likewise touched her heart and begot a greatness there. Under a flowering rowan she stood, then turned away, and the moon flashed in her eyes as she moved to depart.

“I'll trust him!” she said, “and please God, I'll come hither again of a fine night, for 'tis good to be here. As much out of the bustle of life as if one was in the grave. Yet a place for thinking kindly. So like as not my fear be a part of all this moonshine, an' he ban't coming at all. To-morrow ——”

Then abruptly, sharply, with the ludicrous insolence and in consequence of a little child who chirruped sud-

denly about his own affairs in some cathedral, there fell a sound, and a man approached whistling '*Widecombe Fair*.' His music trailed shrill and jejune along the darkness. Its incongruity was even perceived by Ann, but she knew that her husband uttered it. Anthony's unfailing whistle at home indicated cheerfulness. There she liked it well; but in this temple of night, his noise suggested to her want of perception and a poor spirit in the man. She forgot, so thinking, that a habit will not change at a touch of moonlight; she did not remember that, happy or unhappy, excited or indifferent, her husband always whistled and whistled.

Here, then, he was, and she determined, since his friend had not yet come, to take the first step and appear before him.

"He'll count to see a man an' be frightened to find a female," she thought. "An' I'll say I'm sorry for doubting an' spying upon him. 'Twill be a punishment to confess so much."

Thus Ann resolved while still uplifted by vigil; but a circumstance suddenly changed her mind. Still whistling, her husband rose out of the night, and she observed that he was curiously laden. On a pitchfork over his shoulder he carried a heap of dry fern. This he threw down, where two arms of the broom patch extended and a slope of grass filled the space between them. Then he sat and rested. She could perceive the dark form of him touched with light. He was evidently happy. He whistled again, then turned his head and listened. Presently he lighted his pipe. A match flamed and for a moment she saw his great beard and smiling eyes. Still she made no effort to approach, for his contentment, good spirits and eager expectation all impressed themselves very significantly upon her and killed her recent resolves. Then her

husband did a strange thing, the meaning of which made her heart stand still. He took his load and spread it, and fashioned a soft, sweet couch of it. His back was towards her, but he worked busily and she could see what he was doing. She stared and everything slipped from her mind but that bed of fern. The hour changed with one pulse of her heart. The beauty shrivelled out of it, the glory died, and left all barren and waste—a picture stamped on memory and hideous for ever. Wrought of ebony and staring light, innocent of atmosphere, clear-cut, harsh and hard, the nightly earth stretched round her; and her husband stood in the midst and made ready—for no man.

Once Redvers laughed and the genial sound stung Ann like an East wind. Why did he laugh? What was coming to win this anticipatory glee from him? She knew him so well, that she could answer her own question. Thus he laughed before some sensuous prospect; thus he would chuckle as he lifted the long drink of cider to his lips when hot and thirsty; or as he sat down to the added luxuries of Sunday dinner. What feast awaited him now?

She came near screaming, and had he glanced that way, he must have observed her, where she stood, staring over the earth-wall at him with the white light on her sunbonnet.

Anon he sat down and remained silent. The familiar smell of his tobacco tainted night and crept to her nostrils; then he rose and walked about, and his watch-glass flashed as he read the hour. But he was not as impatient as Ann.

Lastly, far away, like a bird that wakes beside its mate, sings a moment for joy and sleeps again, there came a sound upon the hill—a few soft, human notes, full and round.

"My li'l nightingale!" said Anthony, and his wife heard the words. Now her senses quickened and while indifferent to carelessness before the man alone, she sank out of sight at the advent of the woman, and retreated behind a screen of shadow. She cherished hope until his joyous words fell on her ears and slew it.

Some moments later night had borne a dim female shape that separated itself from the darkness and came and stood beside Anthony. His wife saw the two figures thicken into one; she heard his hungry kisses on an unknown cheek, and leapt up like a tigress. Then she fell back again, shaking and faint. She felt her blood freeze in her veins; but suddenly it coursed again and began to boil there. Her face burnt; her eyes burnt; the Moor and the moon fell together and whirled in a fiery mist. She shook her head to clear her sight and drew her breath deep to still her heart.

Her husband was speaking through laughter. His voice rose and fell quickly. Triumph and impatience marked it; and the woman answered, but so softly that Ann could hear little that she said.

"I've made a brave pillow of fern for 'e—a sweet lair!"

"What a word! You talk as if we was wild beasts."

"Well, well; we'll be so happy as them, anyway. My own vixen for many a day now, an' me your old red fox!"

The figures faded away, and sank silently upon earth's sleeping bosom, so that she saw them no more.

Ann rushed thence, careless of the great noise she made. But neither the man nor the other woman heard anything, for all their senses were throbbing with one another.

Blind, deaf, a palpitating bundle of nerves stripped raw, with eyes that only looked inward and ears that only echoed her husband's voice, the wife departed; while chance and instinct held her up and saved her from physical injury in that reckless and dangerous retreat. She fell once and bruised herself, but rose, struggled on to the river and waded through it. Her first desire was to put the round world between herself and the broom patch; then impulses dragged her back and she re-crossed the stream and began to re-climb the hill. Presently she stopped and turned again and travelled horizontally along the Moor in the direction of home. The ford of Culliver's Steps lay beneath her, and she descended to the river once more and sat down beside a broad reach where the water spread unruffled and the moon, already past her zenith, shone reflected therein.

For Ann darkness was now grown no more than the hiding-place of evil. Night knew that and felt with her. Its splendour already waned. A mist of clouds hung low along the ridges of the land southward, dimmed the stars, and, stretching easterly, gathered there above dawn.

The watcher began now to array her thoughts and consider the meaning of her discovery. And first she found herself doubting her own senses. Amazement that her husband was faithless made her almost forget to breathe. Anger kept as yet far from her. The prodigious nature of this discovery left no room for anything but unmixed astonishment in heart and head. That this simple creature, so canine in his fidelity for twenty years, so trustful, so dependent, so thankful for small marital mercies, — that he should look elsewhere and think of love! The plotting and planning necessary to this intrigue overwhelmed her, when she re-

flected upon them. He had said 'for many a day'; and he had known of this tryst even when he welcomed his wife home again and frisked at sight of her, like a single-hearted dog that greets his mistress. To find such subtlety in this slight man quite overturned her brain. She had long supposed that she knew all of him, yet here, suddenly, was a window open; and she looked through and saw his heart emptied of her and full of another woman. For that night, at least, she was swept away as a thing neither vital nor essential to him; for that hour he was all another's and had dropped her and her right and her claim out of his existence utterly. Moreover, she had been fooled by him for a space of time concerning the duration of which she could form no opinion. 'For many a day,' were the words that rang through her mind.

Long she sat in thought, and then the preliminary amazement waned, as the moon waned, and the inevitable, enduring passion of the heart dawned with day. Like a whisper of storms it arose by gradual ascent. The awful emotion presently to catch up this woman crept upon her slowly, as the hurricane first roughens the still pool at a breath, plays with the fallen leaves, and murmurs its thunder gently under far-off horizons. With oncomings reluctant and slow it approached; her wonderment died away and the fact of his deed began to age and grow familiar. She thought upon her recent absence from him, and how he had employed it. His customary cheerful and affectionate demonstrations now stood for an added infamy. She had deemed it to his credit and her renown that he had travelled so frequently to see her while she nursed her old mother at Holsworthy; she had chided him for coming too often; but now the recollection of his visits only served to magnify the intervals between

them. Far, far too seldom had he come ; and here was the reason. She examined his life with a bitter scrutiny ; and she began to find a thousand questionable things in it. Incidents that had not struck her as mysterious, and were indeed not so, now loomed pregnant with meaning. The fever burning her distorted sense cast unreal illumination upon thought ; but she believed this ghastly ray was the sidelight of truth itself.

She built up a new husband — a man different in every inward respect from Anthony Redvers. She made the mistake of believing that she did not know him aright, because she did not know him entirely. She had in truth apprehended him with a perfection of relative knowledge, rare even between wife and husband. That absolute knowledge is impossible concerning anything, she knew not ; but now at least she had discovered a paramount and hidden truth ; whereupon her heart grew sick and her understanding suffered from poison at its very springs. So she came to the monogamic woman’s customary attitude before this fact ; while hereditary instincts and accepted religion combined with personal leaven of character to make the circumstance specially terrific in her eyes. Anger rushed upon her ; she gasped the sweet icy air, and breathed it hotly forth in a cloud that the moon silvered. She puzzled no more, marvelled no more and sighed no longer. She surrendered herself to a masterwrath before her own shattered and disgraced existence. Passion swept over her, blinded her and crushed her where she sat motionless above the river. Only her contracted forehead, open mouth and agonised eyes spoke of the tumult in her heart ; but such a frozen attitude, while proper to grief, in rage was horrible.

The moon had set and torches of the dawn burnt rosily behind the eastern hills before she moved.



Young day, with woodbine colours in his hair, awoke only to die. He flushed the granite crowns of the land, kissed the little rivers and drew the mists in each dark valley upward to his shining feet. But the shadow of storm ascended with him out of morning, and it cried along the Moor and brought a darkness that smothered the brief glory of sunrise. Hope faded from the sky; a strong, fierce wind leapt out of grey cloud-banks and rain began to threaten.

Physically exhausted and shaking with cold, Ann Redvers moved homeward, to meet her son Michael upon the way. He was returning from Belstone, whither he had been to seek her, and he ran up to her now and praised God and kissed her.

"Thank the Lord—thank the Lord," he cried. "What I've suffered this night! Oh, mother, how could you? I've tramped to Okehampton to seek you; an' now I've just come back from Belstone. What I've been through! An' thought of all the horrors that ever got into a man's head. What in the name of fortune's happened to keep you out thus? Say you'm well. I swear my hair would have turned grey afore morning."

"Where's your father? 'Twas like you to fret. But I'm well enough."

"Faither's in bed an' asleep ages ago. He comed home by eleven an' was going to sit up for you. But I said I would, so he went to bed an' was asleep afore 'twas time to be frightened for 'e. An' Jesse too. So off I went to tramp round, an' I've knocked a good few folk out of their beds axin' for you. But how terrible thankful I be you'm home. An' you want another supper—or a breakfast by now. I've kept the fire up, an' I'll have a cup of tea ready in a minute. Why, never such a thing happened afore!"

He made much of her and fetched her a meal. But she could not eat.

"I'm scorched up," she said. "Get me a drop of water, Michael; then go to bed, dear heart. 'Twas like you to fret. Oh, my God — there ban't none to fret no more for me now — none but you. An' I thought — I thought ——"

Intense weariness bred a mental weakness that was foreign to Ann's nature. Now she broke off and wept; and the boy came and took off her sunbonnet and kissed her forehead.

"There — don't 'e cry, my own mother. To think of it! You to cry! But I'll not sleep till I've righted you. What dreadful thing have falled out? Shall I call down faither?"

"No, let him sleep. He's tired. Oh, Michael, Michael — he'm nought to us — nought to any of us no more; an' I'm nought to him. A traitor, Michael — another woman — some bobbing-Joan. That I should live on after to-night!"

The boy showed frank and absolute amazement.

"Faither! You'm dreaming — 'tis surely bewitchment, if such things can be."

"Don't you whisper it. I shouldn't have told you to-morrow. I can't keep it in now. Be dumb about it. Forget it. I must think an' think. But I was a weak fool to darken your days with it. Don't tell Jesse."

Michael still stared. This story seemed wildly unreal, and his mother's manner was unreal also. He had never known her thus weak and unguarded. He had never seen tears upon her face. For a moment he doubted whether she knew what she was saying. At last he answered her.

"Think again, for God's sake, mother. Surely no

truth can be in such a thing. You've been pixy-led, I do believe. 'Tis some trick of the little people to show us ban't wise to laugh at 'em."

She shook her head.

"If I could think so! I seed with these eyes. False—false he be—false as the first snake. A cruel mask—an' 'deep as sin under his eternal laughing. He said 'many a day.' That was his word to her."

"God judge him then! Only speak the word, an' I'll take you away from him, so as you shall never see him no more. I'll take you away, an' think for you, an' fight for you, an' try the best I can to make up for this fearful thing."

"You'm my dear son—an' he be your father."

"If I knowed where he was in me, I'd tear him out!"

A tall clock in the corner chimed half-past three.

"Go to your rest now. You'll have to be up on the ranges in an hour," she said.

"An' you? You shan't suffer it. Damn him, though he be my faither. I'd grease the stairs for him—an' be glad if I broke his neck. What be you going to do, mother?"

"Never ax about me. I'll do very well. I'll fall asleep an' forget presently. An' I'll wake again an'—do."

"What—what'll you do?"

"What? Yes, that's it. My thoughts slip away like running water. I've got the headache so bad. Come morning, I'll be myself again—and face it."

"Don't forgive him! Never forgive him!"

The boy had caught her passion now; in her it was numbed and quite worn out.

"Leave that," she said. "I was the same awhile

back, when first it came home to me. The blood tried to burst out of my heart an' choke me. I saw the moon roll red. Go to your sleep, I say. I'll bide below to-night."

"You shan't bide alone—for there's no sleep for you."

She rose and with her remaining energy commanded.

"Not a word more. You, at least, love me true."

"Yes, mother."

"All mine still—for I don't share your heart with any female yet—just love for a poor mother fills it. That's something in' this hour. Now, Michael boy, do as I bid, an' get away to your bed—quick—quick."

He did not answer, but threw his arms round her, kissed her again and left the room; and then she rose and went into her little parlour. She stood for a moment by the harmonium, whereon Anthony was wont to play hymns with one finger during Sunday afternoons. For some time she looked blankly out into the gathering storm, and at last she turned to a sofa and sat down upon it. Mechanically she loosened the buttons at her throat, and took off her shoes and wet stockings; then she lay down, sighed once or twice and immediately fell into gentle and easy slumber.

Outside the wind began to rise and the first patter of rain fell upon the window.

## CHAPTER IX

### WILD WEATHER

**R**ETURNING from the artillery ranges near Taw Marsh, Jesse Redvers struck into Belstone quarry on his way home to Harter. Against the stormy morning this centre of industry stared out pallid and raw, for whereas the granite of the hills and valleys had taken on time's harmonious livery, here freshly broken stone shone crude against the dark mass of the hill and showed like a wound, where man had dived into the breast of the mountain for its bones.

The ancient mode of splitting out stone is yet adopted and the old tools are still handled under their historic names. The jumper, the borer, the pick and the point may be aided by machinery and dynamite, but they persist; while the 'feather and tear' system in skilled hands produces the best blocks of granite. None better understood this method than Mr. Bloom. He would drill a row of holes some three inches deep in a mighty block, insert wedges deftly between thin pieces of hoop iron, and presently strike along their heads in turn until the mass fell open, perfectly divided.

While the rain in grey sheets swept Belstone quarry and the wind ran the drops along the bending rushes; while the ponies, driven from the ranges, herded on Cosdon's side and turned tail patiently to the foul weather, William Arscott, who cared nothing for heat

or cold, sun or rain, stood among his men and spoke with Mr. Bloom. He pointed to a rock at their feet from which a mass had been cleanly broken.

"Clear this out," he said. "Get the earth off and see how far it runs back. Supposing 'tis all it looks and deep enough, you'd best drill for the wedges yourself. If we get it out clean, the natural shape is such that it will save a pound's worth of labour in the working afterwards."

Joshua nodded his understanding, and presently Arscott withdrew. But first he glanced round the works and spoke a word — sharp and short — to each man and boy engaged there.

Upon the master's departure Jesse came forward, pulled up his pony beside Mr. Bloom and talked awhile. The old man spoke as he made rough measurement of the granite and dug the soil away from it.

"To be put up for a drinking-trough in memory of Squire Chase's madam. She was a blacksmith's darter; but he sent her to school for two years afore he married her, an' what with that an' her natural fine sense, the bettermost never made any bones about axing her to their houses. 'Twill be a boon to over-driven cattle, no doubt."

"Arscott's likely to make a tidy penny by that — eh?"

"He will. I'd give a shilling to know what he'll ax for it."

The quarrymen now sought shelter for breakfast. Joshua Bloom drew a dry sack from under a rock, flung it down inside a weather-proof shed and presently began his meal. He produced two slices of bread with a layer of bacon between them, and he cut this food into little squares, then stabbed two or three together on to his knife and so transferred them to his mouth.

"Should ever you chance to hear of any man as wants granite, let me know," he said. "For if I could get Arscott an order here an' there, he might not be in such a hurry to sack me. His friendship's life an' death to me; but you don't want it."

"I hate him," answered Jesse. "'Money value' is the only God he's got, for all he goes to church so steady. He looks at every tree as so many feet o' timber; an' every river as so much power running to waste."

"Ah! a wonder for work. He feeds on it. Work be the breath of his body. An' can make money so easy as the earth grows grass. Not but what the man have his black moments. One was when old May-bridge died an' the parish had to bury him. He owed my gentleman five pounds, an' what he left weren't worth five pence. But he got it back out of the world one way an' another. He's always quits with human nature. Then I mind the time when Barbara West-away wouldn't have him—back-along ten year or so."

This subject interested Jesse Redvers. It was characteristic of the youth that he would sooner confess his secret ambitions and disappointments to an outsider and seek strangers' sympathy, than go to his own.

"Yes," continued Bloom. "He told no man, but kept so tight shut about it as the tomb. Yet it outed as she'd said 'no' to him. An' for all his money, she never done a wiser thing. My word! He took it out of all of us over that job."

Jesse looked round to see that none overheard; then he spoke. "I love her sister Salome—with all my heart an' soul I love her; an' I wish to Heaven she'd have me."

"Won't she?"

"No. I've set it afore her. But she plays with it — like a girl plays with a bunch o' flowers — off an' on — a touch here, a touch there. Yet if she only would — 'Tis a sad loss for me, because I might cut a figure presently if I had a clever wife. As it is, everything be so mean in my life. An' the work is such that really a man with brains in his head ought to be pitied for having to do it."

Mr. Bloom stopped eating, emptied his mouth, stared at Jesse, whose red coat was changing colour under the rain, and then laughed sourly.

"You be like your father — impatient of trouble an' can't bear it single-handed, but must hear people saying they'm sorry for 'e."

"Not at all — it isn't that — I —"

"Yes, it is that. There's a shallow sort as gets live comfort from the chatter of neighbours — God knows how — as though talk could mend a trouble worth the name. But if you wants me to say I'm sorry, be damned if I do. A boy of your age is better single."

"All old men talk that way," said Jesse. "How about when you were in love?"

"I never was — no more than a caterpillar," replied Joshua firmly. "That's a solemn fact. I never cared a cuss for females. You must be well fed an' full o' beans for that work. It took me all my time in my youth — as it still do — to keep clothes on my bones an' food inside of me. The barley bread I've eaten! But this generation fattens on wheat."

"All the same, it isn't natural not to care for the girls when you're young," argued Jesse.

"Ess — sure. Nature tickles us into breeding, afore we've got the brains in our heads to keep away from it. When a man's come to his reason, 'tis too late so often



as not. If none was ever touched to look at the women till he'd turned of fifty, there wouldn't need no more workhouses."

"'Tis a very unnatural thought, surely."

"It may be," answered Joshua Bloom. "But my life was unnatural, for that matter. I always went in fear of poverty afore most chaps think of aught but bird-nesting. 'Twas always hanging over me. An' now it's come to the door, an' I be used to the notion, an' don't partickler care. You can only live your life once; an' that's about the most comforting thought ever comes in my head."

"Your work's made you hard, Josh. You've crushed away at the granite all your life; an' you've got it into you."

"So much the better. You need a hard corner-stone to your heart now-a-days, if you want to be at peace with things. I was like you once: full of ideas. I could sweat with rage to see folks suffering for no fault of their own. I'd even feel hope lifting in me after a glass of beer in them days; now a barrel won't wake it. Still, you'm young. Ax her to marry you again, if you must have her. An' try an' do some deed to catch her eye."

"That's it — that's the very thing," said Jesse with intense eagerness. "I'm thirsting to do a deed and to be suddenly called to some big action to show what stuff I'm made of. My life's such a tame affair. There's no more *to* it than there is to a frog's in a pond. I want to go out in the world an' show my metal; but father's so against it an' says he couldn't get on without me."

A messenger arrived for Mr. Bloom from his master. The morning's post had brought an order of immediate urgency.

Joshua finished his breakfast with a draught of cold tea. Then he rose to walk to Belstone, and young Redvers bade him good morning and turned his pony homewards. The lad experienced some satisfaction at this interview, albeit there was little of an encouraging nature in Bloom's philosophy; but Jesse would have felt less pleasure to hear his secret openly discussed by the quarryman immediately afterwards.

Mr. Bloom met Barbara Westaway struggling along under a leaky umbrella, and together they descended into the village, while he spoke of what he had just heard.

"So your sister won't take Jesse Redvers?" he asked.

She started, for Jesse's courting was a secret from her.

"What then, Mr. Bloom? Ban't no law why she should—eh? You can't force your taste in love-making. But how come you to know so much?"

"The boy's like his father—wants to be patted now an' then, same as a dog do. He'm a thought down in the mouth; an' counting on me for a wise, ancient man—though Lard He knows my wisdom haven't brought me nothing—he tells me as Sally Westaway won't take him. Not that he got much out of me: I never was for matrimony. I've got to thank it for all troubles."

"You! Never—a bachelor!"

"Born in wedlock."

Barbara laughed.

"I reckon you'm right. My sister an' me ban't marrying women anyway. Why, Arscott axed me twice, an' offered to settle money on me by law. But I hadn't no use for the man. You can get your pleasure out of life without marriage, if you'm witty."

"I've never had no time even to think o' pleasure, let alone come by it," declared Joshua.

"Well, it ban't much in my way, I'm sure. My life's wrapped up in my old dear to home. Such a soft-hearted gawkim as he be! Living without spending is making bricks without straw — that's my sole pleasure. For there is a pleasure in doing it."

"I wonder you didn't take Billy Arscott."

"Couldn't stand the man himself. For that matter, if I found myself rich, the work of my life would be gone. I've never larned to do anything but make both ends meet; an' that's all I can do."

"A very respectable task for a female," declared Mr. Bloom admiringly. "An' not one they shines at most times. Now, if I was thirty years younger, an' you favourable, we'd have made a very pretty pair; an' fought a fine battle to keep out of the workhouse; an' very likely done it. But as 'tis, I'm booked there an' you too — onless your father — but a leopard can't change his spots. He comes down to the public-house an' says 'retrench' in that large, cheerful way — just as if to say it covered the doing."

"Bless the old beauty! 'Twould most make you laugh, I do think. He'll scrimp an' screw for a fortnight; an' let his socks wear out because he won't have his boots mended; an' leave the cabbages to the slugs — for thrift; an' then comes along a beggar, an' you'll catch him giving the rascal half a loaf wi' cheese to match, an' saying how them in easy circumstances must help to bear the world's trouble!"

"Cut out for poor relief, if no worse," said Bloom positively. "I'm sorry for you; but 'tis a case."

"Not if me an' sister can help it."

"See he pays his interest — that's all. That's fatal

if it runs. Arscott'll have his claws in your old man, like a hawk in a mouse."

"I know—I know," said Barbara. "My stars! You'm a Job's comforter, if ever there was one. What with the weather an' you—but here I turn off—good morning, Joshua."

Meantime Jesse had returned home, to find the house empty. His brother had gone to work on the farm; his father was upon the Moor; his mother had also left home, and Mrs. and Mr. Tapp were in Okehampton, for they had started early to be present at a nephew's wedding there.

Ann rose that morning from one hour of sleep before her husband was awake. He remained ignorant that she had not been to bed, and after breakfast went out with a horse and cart to collect the shattered shells from the ranges. As yet no significant word had been uttered, and husband and wife took their meal in silence, for their sons were already at work and the Tapps had started.

When Anthony was gone out, Ann herself, now physically calmer, walked alone upon the Moor. She climbed through the wild weather where ridge rolled up above ridge, and where divers hues of storm soaked the high land in planes of grey and black and purple. Tremendous forces were moving; the wind raved, and round about Ann, where she sat under the shelter of great boulders upon Rough Tor, the Moor whispered with water and every pool and puddle ran in miniature waves. A deep organ sound ascended from the harps of the granite, and an under moan answered the wind where it lashed the heath and bending reed-bed. The music rose and fell as the wind panted, and, in the silences, came the call of the rivers between the cry of the stones.

The storm increased and raged furiously. The rain sped horizontally in sheets ; the clouds rolled down like grey wool upon the tors, then, torn to pieces by the wind, they fled before it. Great gleams of cold light broke through, touched the soaking desolation, turned in upon themselves again and disappeared. Successive washes of the rain, imposed on each other, blotted out even the immediate foreground, and sometimes all sounds were lost to Ann save the actual hurtle of the downpour around her. The cold breath of the storm rebounding from the granite, roughly pressed her cheek and flapped her dripping sunbonnet against it. The tempest lashed her agony of mind, and the birth of this new knowledge and the death of her old opinions alike tortured her. The foundation-stone of a fabric that had stood for twenty years was now torn away, and ruination threatened. Her fallen beliefs only revealed their significance in the moment of disappearance ; her dead convictions were at the roots of all her married relations with Anthony, and their destruction left nothing to bind her to him longer. She had taken those facts as fundamental, fixed, assured beyond possibility of change. Now life lost its linch pin, and she stood face to face with the catastrophe. She well remembered her criticism on similar incidents, when scandals arose and the affairs of unhappy men and women formed matter for public attention. She had always blamed the man if the woman erred, and she had judged the woman in fault if the man strayed from her. Now she reconsidered this theory and found it based upon no infallible rule. She did not censure herself before this crisis — not until the sequel.

A cart came rattling over the hill, like a black smudge driven before the rain, and Ann saw her husband pass near her with a load of broken shell metal.

To his surprise, she suddenly appeared in front of the cart, whereupon he stopped, and she mounted and sat beside him.

"Well now! I'd so soon have expected old Bingle from Cranmere Pool! What on the Lord's earth be you about all alone in this? Drenched to the skin; an' my coat's no use, for 'tis a wet rag."

"I'm glad I met you," she answered, "for I want to speak to you private. Can't here with the wind screeching and the cart jolting; but after dinner I'll ax you to stop indoors an' hear me."

"So I will then. To think of you up in this gert storm! Never knowed the like for June. Sit close an' I'll shelter you all I can. If the wet don't make your face shine like a maiden's! Bless your beautiful eyes. They grow brighter as the years pass, I believe."

Mr. Redvers loved to court his wife in this gallant fashion when opportunity offered. If he caught her alone, he generally tried to caress her. His manners reminded Ann of a gallant cock pigeon, and she repulsed him or forgave him, according to her own mood. Now in her ears, clearer than the voice of the man or the crash of the weather, was a sound of kisses on an unknown cheek. She shuddered and flamed and shrank. Then, as he stopped a moment after crossing a ford over the Blackavon brook above Harter, Ann slipped off the cart quickly and proceeded home on foot.

Mr. Redvers whistled and plodded on with anxiety and grief upon his face.

"New trouble," he reflected. "What screw be loose now, I wonder?"

## CHAPTER X

‘THE WIND BLOWETH WHERE IT LISTETH’

**L**IKE many weak natural creatures, Anthony Redvers made craft stand for mastery and sometimes achieved by stealth what he could not win by force. He had often been surprised at his own skill in subterfuge, and still more by the cleverness with which his secret woman hoodwinked her world. A deeper knowledge of human nature might have dispelled his wonder at these ordinary circumstances. His peculiar and harmless vein of cunning was effectively masked by a very genuine goodness of heart, by magnanimity and simplicity. For simple he was in most directions. His offence to abstract morals centred in sensuality. Strong desire at length plunged him into hidden pleasure. His marriage was in some degree responsible, and a woman of a different pattern from Ann had easily kept him to herself. For more than fifteen years, indeed, he never wandered; then, little by little, he thought of others, while she, wrapt in her own conceits, grew colder and older; and he continued to remain young.

A conscience mother-taught smarted at his first experiments, and Anthony went in secret misery and discomfort for a while; but time healed his uneasiness. Presently he lived a double life as a matter of course. His private pleasures made him publicly more genial, kind-hearted and tolerant. He judged no man and

criticised no woman. He was almost perfectly happy and contented. He loved his wife and never wearied of singing her praises. He held her faultless. Discovery of the least flaw in Ann would have rendered his own mind more easy. As for the companion of his concealed existence, she also found him affectionate, grateful and sincere.

Nature instructed this woman. . She loved Redvers passionately. She had long since observed that such an intimate friendship is only disgraceful when discovered, that relations unknown are, for practical social purposes, non-existent. Her instinct told her that there must be many thousands of women in the world who, like herself, enjoyed the glories of sense by stealth, and sipped secretly from the cup of knowledge; as the soft moth unseen drinks from the chalice of nocturnal flowers. No finger was ever pointed at her; she guarded her life well. But first she went in fear that Anthony’s nature was not built to sustain an intrigue. Presently, however, she found that he could be cleverer than himself in this matter; and thus they astonished each other mutually.

Now the security of two years begot carelessness, and after all, it was the woman, not the man, who had let truth slip out into daylight.

Like a thunderbolt, burst discovery upon the secure hour of Anthony Redvers. The midday meal was eaten in silence and seemed an omen of what must follow it. Michael evidently suffered from deep emotion. There was hatred in his eyes as he looked at his father. Neither he nor his mother spoke during the course of dinner and, after it was finished, the lad took his gun and went out into the stormy weather. Jesse alone preserved some form of cheerfulness; and he also soon left the house upon business of his own.



Then Ann waited and watched her husband as he settled beside the peat fire and lighted his pipe. For a moment she mused curiously as to how soon it would go out again. Then she spoke to him.

"I'll not pile up words, or play with you, Redvers; I'll not make you lie to me no more, and I'll not leave you in any doubt as to what I know, or how I know it."

He stared, but the truth never entered his thoughts even as a possibility.

"What a rumpus! What have I done now? You must make me wish you had stopped at — but I won't say that, for 't isn't true, Ann. Yet, ever since you came home, my dear, there's been little but sour looks for me. An' Michael your echo. Damn the boy, what's come to him? Always up against me; an' glares at me with his hard eyes as if I was his mortal foe, 'stead of his father. An' a good father too, though I say it. I'm very much to be pitied in him, an' you ought to get him to behave better. To-day I lost my temper 'pon the ranges an' fetched my whip across his jacket thrice, for all his age. I will have proper respect from my son. I have it from all the world, an' I'll have it from Michael Redvers too."

His wife looked into his face and answered.

"The world may not know so much about a man as his own son."

"Another riddle."

"What—what were you doing in the broom patch last night?"

The man's wooden pipe fell out of his mouth and the amber splintered. She could comment on the accident, even at that moment.

"I wondered how long you'd smoke when I began to talk. Your pipe an' your peace be broke for ever."

He leant back and gasped. His face grew suddenly wet. He mopped his forehead with his sleeve, then drew out a handkerchief from his pocket.

“You’m right there. I suppose it’s all over for evermore. So you’ve found out. I thought you would somehow. Long ago I feared you would. But not of late.”

“Conscience soon gets a hard skin when you expose it. You—you to be one of that sort! I’d have believed that any man living might afore you.”

The quietness and dignity of her accusation impressed him in that dark hour.

“It astonished me, too,” he answered. “I was mazed to find I could do it so easy, an’ get over the twinge so soon. Thank God you can keep cool, for if you was to flare, I should go out an’ drown myself this minute. Angry you must be, of course, according to your lights, but ’tis like your pluck to hide it. Well, all’s up. No wife could forgive, or understand. What’s your will?”

“As to understanding, I’ve understood you pretty well, I believe. I’ve been a good wife an’ had your welfare before my eyes from the day I comed out of church with you.”

“That have you,” he admitted; “an’ afore we were married too—from the hour you said ‘yes’ down by the river. A wife in ten million. An’ well I know it. You’ve been my glory an’ my God for that matter. I’ve made you my first thought an’ prayer, I’ve——”

These words woke the first anger and she interrupted them.

“Liar—liar to talk that trash! False—even to me. False while you kissed me; false while your eyes fed on my body, false——”

"No," he said. "No, Ann; I stand here, an' call God to strike me dead if I tell anything but truth; an' say I've been so true to you as I have been to myself. I've stood up for you with all the loyal love an' worship I've got in me—always."

"I saw you make her bed."

"Is it to be false to one woman to be fond of another? Do 'e think I've not gone over this ground in my mind a thousand times? 'Tis only a wicked saying of the parsons' that a man can't love two women true an' tender. Love's an honest thing, an' them as have made it to be a wicked thing are black-coated devils that would starve the nature out of human life, if they could. I love you with all my heart and soul; I'd die for you an' die laughing; an' you can't call home one impatient word, or unkind deed, or harsh speech from me in your life. I'm 'nought beside you for greatness; but I can love if I can't do nothing much else; an' I've loved you rising an' sleeping, winter an' summer, year in, year out. I never thanked God for nought but you. You've made me what I am, an' you *know* I love you as well as you know any mortal thing. An' t'other, too, be a dear thought to me. It is so. I won't deny it. It can't work—of course I know that very well. Such things only go on comfortable so long as they ban't known. I'd gladly have lost my right arm afore ever you should have come to find out, for I well understand what hell this is to your stern pattern of mind."

"She's younger than me?"

"Let her go. Bless the wind! The house shakes!"

His wife gazed silently at him for a while, then he suddenly resumed.

"I've got a decent soul in me, whatever you may

think, Ann. I never once went near our old love-walks — nor near the places you liked in the old time when now and again you could find half an hour for a stroll. Never once. They’m just as holy like as they was to me twenty year ago.”

“Twenty year — yes. An’ you no older seemingly — except in sin. A pure, clean, young youth then — now —”

“I don’t grow old very quick,” he confessed. “But I reckon I shall after this. It all went well enough, because nobody was hurt by it. Now that you’m hurt so cruel, ’tis different. I wish to God — but that’s vain now. Only I’ve been steadfast as the pole-star, for all your doubting. The way of a man’s body’s nothing if his heart be right.”

He beat his breast with a great hand.

“This here dust is only solid for a minute. ’Twill be in the pit afore long — forgotten. But my conscience have long since grown clear.”

“Ban’t clearness, but death! Conscience! To come to me from cuddling her!”

“Try an’ grasp hold of my meaning afore it’s too late,” he said. “I’m built so; my flesh an’ blood’s a bit too much for me; but I’ll swear my heart’s in hand. I ban’t such a bad man as you’m thinking this minute.”

She rose, walked to the window and stood looking out upon the storm.

“Well, life’s done,” he said in a resigned tone. “All’s over. I’ve thought sometimes it must come. I can’t ax you to be generous, because you’m not built that way. Ban’t a vartue of women in a fix like this. But this I’ll say: if it happened t’other way round —”

She turned in wrath.

“You dare! To think that — to harbour such a

thought in your filthy mind — against me! Foul — foul you've grown — foul to the eyes — fouler an' fouler as each year went past."

"I wasn't thinking no such mad thing — only saying that I — There's no common clay at all in you. You can't see my low pattern of mind, no more than a — Yet, I understand you, for often an' often I've closed my eyes in shame to think what a high-minded woman was asleep alongside me. But that's not to say I've been partickler wrong — only weaker — made o' poorer metal — as flaws easier — not so hard an' fine in the grain as you be. I've always given you best. I've known the little good in me was your work. But 'twasn't in mortal to unmake me an' make me again different. Even you couldn't do that."

For a moment Ann harboured a strange thought and believed that she might have unmade him and made him again. She put the idea aside.

"If I'd been a bad wife — but you know the wife I was — always."

"I've said it. I've blown a trumpet about it ever since we was married. All the same, in cold moments I've sometimes felt that the farm an' business, an' weariness of body, an' the boys, an' the fret an' tear of life have come between us a bit now an' then. But I've cursed myself for a weak fool when such ideas came."

"So you were. That I should have married a weak fool!"

"Anyway you done it with your eyes open, Ann, for I was always the same. An' yet not weak in my love for you."

"I did love you," she said slowly; "an' 'twas love that cloaked what I've seen clear enough since: I mean your character. But I was true as steel. I hid

my feelings deep. You’d never have known to your dying day — but for this.”

He smiled gently and stroked his beard twice.

“Did you think I didn’t know? But you was far too honest to play a part, whatever I have been. No, no! ’Twasn’t hid from me, Ann. I’ve understood well enough what you thought of me; an’ I’ve loved you no less. Your true eyes have told it, though your tongue never would. Sometimes I’ve actually seen you despise me when I’ve been too silly to bear. But it made no difference. I’ve whispered a bit sorrowful to my own heart—that’s all. An’ my love have come out of the cloud, like the sun shining. An’ I’ve always felt you was in the right of it. Well — words won’t make no difference. The Lord knows I’m sorry — bitterly sorry — so all’s said.”

“Why for are you sorry?” she asked.

“That you have found out,” he answered. “It went very well so far as I can see — no wrong done an’ a little harmless pleasure for two harmless people; but now I suppose the harmlessness be knocked out of it since you’ve found out.”

“‘Harmless’! You’ve killed your soul — that’s what you’ve done! And maybe the — who was she? Who have shared this masterpiece of wickedness with you, Anthony Redvers?”

“Thank God you don’t know; an’ please God you never shall. That’s so much to the good, anyway.”

She still looked out upon the storm and now her thoughts ran deep. First anger choked her, then chance led her backward in the spirit and her passion cooled, since it was impossible to reflect upon the past and maintain a furious wrath at the same time. Her mind busied itself with the passage of events, and she stood silent and motionless, while her husband turned

his head at her protracted silence and glanced at her. He had not looked at her since the beginning of this conversation. He still sat by the peat fire with his hands together between his knees.

Ann Redvers thought herself into a temporal coolness and self-control. Time rolled back the pages of her life one after another until, from recent periods, during which she had merely existed as a busy machine, she found herself living again, and feeling both grief and joy as now she felt neither. Then two little boys were at her knees, and presently, still retracing her steps, she returned to the bearing of them and perceived that those were the days wherein she had indeed enjoyed fulness of life. The page that chronicled motherhood still glowed with colours tender and beautiful, but subsequent years held no such high days and latter time looked pale contrasted with the past.

She remembered when Redvers came to court her, and marvelled to find that he had scarcely changed since then. Her sons were come out of infancy to the threshold of manhood; she was grown from a girl to a busy woman of some note in her small world. But he remained one with the ardent lover who had babbled to her by the river—a creature unchanging as the river itself, until now. His sons were older at heart than their father.

She remembered small things. They tumbled in upon her memory; they came to light as the curtain lifted on her courting in the woodland ways beside Oke. His sudden kisses—his tremendous plans for prosperity—his sparing of a big trout because she pitied it—his buying of keepsakes for her until he ran in debt—his imperishable enthusiasm at her larger learning and wonderful memory—his ready emotions and quick leap from laughter to depression—all came

back. She wondered much at herself in those days. Sometimes, without being asked to do so, she had rubbed her cheek against his that he might feel how soft it was. Then the little, pretty, fond follies of love ran riot through her aching heart, like a dance of Cupids.

And before these thronging recollections a spirit woke in her and rose as from sleep. A magic thing happened—such an accident as only chances in a woman’s soul. This terrific day, instead of killing love, wakened it.

An active, morbid and passionate affection had scarcely survived the night on Halstock Hill; but Ann’s old regard for her husband perchance escaped death by its dormancy, and now grew active upon this change and upheaval. Whether it only awoke to perish, as the sleeper, long tranced, recovers consciousness a moment before he passes beyond sleep, time would tell. At least her sterling rectitude now affirmed that this long suspension of her affection was not Anthony’s fault; and for a wonderful, brief moment she loved him again with the old tenderness.

She turned and looked at him where his profile stood strongly out against the gloom of the chimney. His handsome face and bowed head remained motionless. He felt that she was regarding him, but he did not turn. In his soul the past was also living. Profound regrets mounted in him; darkness encompassed him round about; voices whispered that life’s sweetness was gone for ever; that only dregs remained in the cup thereof.

She tried to read something into his impressive features and failed. Anthony’s great beard concealed much that set his mouth twitching. He only waited to hear sentence, and during her long silence he sank



into a sort of lethargy. His mind passed over to the other woman and he began to be very sad for her. Then he remembered how safe she was, and his sorrow returned to the grief that he had brought upon his wife.

Ann Redvers also thought upon herself, and only herself, at this juncture. She had passed beyond the spectacle of justice, as she understood it, and a native greatness of mind came now to glance in the direction of charity. Even had Redvers perceived some extenuations, he had not urged them, nor dared to suppose that they could win an instant's consideration at the tribunal of her heart. But that she, from her own torment, might summon a qualifying clause, or make one allowance, was a possibility far beyond the man's imagination. Her actual thought, by the nature of things, must have been impossible to his mind. She conceived a deeper excuse than he could have offered for himself, even had his instinct turned towards excuses; for she perceived that the error was not all of his own commission; she understood that it had required two agents to turn Anthony faithless, and that she was one of them. She believed that she had been strong enough to hold him; and she saw how her indifference, quite as much as his weakness, had loosened the bonds between them. Like the painting of lightning upon night, old pictures flashed up in the substance of Ann's brain. She remembered her chilling repulses to his exuberance; she saw him often subside into himself, as will a dog when suddenly quenched and sent to heel.

The woman rose to grandeur before these thoughts, and turned from his acts done to her own omitted. Her spirit was glorified by an inspiration; and she spoke and said a very marvellous thing, for her word

was nobler than her own nature, and she offered him not sacrifice but mercy. In the hour of humiliation she uttered it; and agony throbbed in every tone of her voice.

“Swear afore Almighty God to give her up, Anthony, an’ I’ll pardon ‘e.”

A blast of wind and a furious rattle of the window-frame accompanied her speech. The gust brought rain with it and dashed a torrent against each little pane. Anthony Redvers was not looking at his wife, and of the words with which she broke the silence he did not hear one syllable. But she, having her eyes upon his face, believed that he listened and understood. She waited for him to answer and marvelled to find his expression blank and his tongue still.

So chance wrecked the sole possibility of salvation for that man and woman. Her humanity soared to grace; and his true love and sense of justice had made him leap to welcome forgiveness with mighty thankfulness and gratitude. Ann’s offer, if comprehended, must have saved them, but the spark was turned from the fuel that waited for it; a breath of wind swept those souls apart for ever, and from that hour nothing interposed to stem the rush of the event.

Anthony showed no sign, and his wife, translating this unconscious indifference to mean deliberate rejection of her overture, found love curdled by that silence to a passion of loathing and of hate. She drew her breath in three great suspirations without an expiration between; she reeled and sat down suddenly by the table; her eyes stared out senseless and expressionless from a face turned to stone. The long brown fingers of her right hand began to play on the table; then the handle of a bread-knife touched them and they seemed to answer the touch automatically and close over it.

Suddenly the man rose to his feet, bent to pick up his hat from the fender where it had been flung to dry, then stood up and looked down at her and spoke. Her fingers loosened off the knife as he did so; but she stared in front of her still and paid no attention to him.

"Well, we are face to face with it now. 'Tis a terrible big thing. Mayhap some sort of a road out will come to you. Don't tell the boys yet. If I must go, I'll go. You an' them can bide. They know the work. I mustn't ruin any of you. An' don't make up your mind to put me away from you too sudden. Think a deal over it. I'll do any mortal thing in reason, an' spare you every pang I can. 'Tis a very great upheaval."

He went out and she remained motionless. Now it had been her turn not to hear. No natural voice intervened; no roar of wind or rattle of wood had shouted down his speech; but her ears were deaf and thunder's voice had not entered them. She was merely conscious that he had spoken and departed. She remained entirely concerned with his previous silence. Self-respect awoke in her, and wounded pride burnt in her heart until it fired deep possibilities.

That day was done a thing whose performance rolled, like a tide, over many lives. The wave set undulating by this accident imparted motion through a whole sea of years and exerted its proper force upon human nature in a degree beyond human power to trace. For no matter how skilfully man measures the immediate effects of action, its ultimate result for ever evades him. The story of life is built up from the consequences of deeds; and these results leaven the very lump of things until the observer accepts them as fundamental and assigns their origin to the absolute. But that is because no mind capable of measuring it, recorded the incipient impulse, and none followed its dædalian progress from generation to generation.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE WELL

**A**NTHONY REDVERS went out, bent to the weather, made fast a banging door, and then took a spade to dig a channel through some ordure in the farmyard, that acted as a dam for the heavy rain. A duck had already found this pool and, as the rich moisture ran away from under it, the bird was stranded. Whereupon it quacked loudly, wagged its bedraggled tail and waddled elsewhere.

The man went to a well at the bottom of this yard. It stood by a low wall, that separated the little plantation from the farm precincts. Now through these poverty-stricken trees Anthony's sons walked together. They had met and the severity of the storm was driving them home. They came side by side, but neither spoke. Michael had a gun over his shoulder, Jesse's hands were in his pockets.

As they approached their father, Ann Redvers came out of the house, and the storm that beat upon her uncovered head drove to the lungs and mounted to the brain of her, like a potion. Death was in her eyes. In solitude her passion had raged up to bursting point; now fury was upon her at flood tide and she had lost her reason. Anthony bent over the well and lowered a bucket as she neared him. His back was turned while he pulled the rope over the windlass and let a mossy wooden bucket slide into the darkness.

The storm shrieked and the rain poured down in stinging sheets; but beneath, all was peaceful and silent where still waters glimmered a hundred feet below.

His wife came close behind him; and even then she might have held her hand; but she heard him whistling — whistling as his habit was at all high moments of emotion. His countenance had shown her that the music was mechanical and produced unconsciously; that his haggard eyes blinked and dropped great tears into the well. But she saw nothing; she only heard the notes of 'Widcombe Fair'; and they conjured up resting-places in the fern, a full round moon, a heart that throbbed in agony amid elemental peace.

She approached him and the primal passion of a beast got hold upon her. She lifted her hands and struck him with all her might across the neck, as he bent with his back turned. Her object at that moment was to kill him. He tottered; his hands went to his head instinctively; his centre of gravity was thrown forward and he vanished head first into the depths.

The last thought in his mind was that the little penthouse above the well had fallen in upon him; and thus he perished, ignorant of the truth.

For a moment Ann stood and listened, but the storm drowned any faint noises from below. She felt a sudden sense of loneliness; but she was not alone, for her sons were looking at her. She heard Jesse shout and turned and saw them.

In a moment they were beside the well and Michael spoke.

"You've killed him, mother."

"He wouldn't give her up," was all the woman could answer. She looked first at one and then at the other son, as though they had been strangers.

"For God's sake say 'twas accident — say 'twas accident," cried the elder.

"'Twas no accident, but justice an' honest dealing," answered Michael. "Mother done right. An' I'll stick up for her for ever."

"I meant to do it," she said. "It came into me like a devil when he wouldn't give her up —— Jesse — Jesse, that rope won't bear you!"

But he was already in the bucket and his brother began to lower it carefully. Presently, as the water touched him, he shouted to Michael to hold on, and his voice shot up out of the darkness strangely intensified. Then, groping, Jesse felt warm, wet flesh and, while one hand clung to the rope, he found his father's head with the other and dragged it out of the water.

"I do think he lives!" he shouted, and his voice burst up out of the pit and brought hope to the woman.

"Please God — please God!" she cried.

Her younger son looked at her, then at the rope. He was a man neither good nor bad; but every human heart has one holy place, and the deity shrined in Michael's spirit was his mother.

"Most a pity it don't break," he said, regarding the tense cord.

The muffled voice rose again.

"Get that strong spare rope from the kitchen cupboard an' lower it down quick. I can make it fast around him, an' us'll fetch him up. I think he breathes; but for God's sake be quick. 'Tis cruel cold for him in the water."

"I'll go," said Ann. "Hold on to the winch for your life, if you love me, Michael."

She ran and returned running. Then she paid out a strong rope and Jesse quickly made it fast under his

father's arms. Next those above dragged the living man up, and the three set about recovery of the dead.

Their task was difficult, but by carrying the rope over the windlass and pulling together, with intervals of rest to regain strength, they gradually drew Anthony into the light. Then they made fast the rope, and lifted him over the parapet of the well, and laid him upon the ground. For a moment all stared uneasily upon him, after which, without any speech, Jesse set off running in the direction of Belstone.

Michael misunderstood him and a great billow of red rolled over his face.

"Stop!" he shouted, and turned for his gun. "Come you back, Jesse Redvers, or, by Christ, I'll shoot you!"

"Michael, Michael!" cried the woman, "call home them words. 'Tis only you an' him left now. 'Tis well he should go — I —"

Jesse had turned and walked back to them. Now he interrupted his mother, but he spoke to Michael.

"Shoot, if you like — shoot me in the back — like she killed father. I was going for doctor — nobody else. But if you'd be a murderer too, kill me an' welcome. I don't want to live no more now he's gone."

Then he turned and walked fast away; but soon undying hope touched the young man and stilled his anger. He thought that his father might yet live, and he broke into a steady run.

His brother looked after Jesse.

"If he brings back any other but doctor, I'll swing for him," he said.

Ann did not answer. She was down on her knees beside her husband. She opened his clothes and put her hand over his heart. Presently she buttoned his

waistcoat again, raised his head a little and brushed the blood off his face. Then she rose to her feet.

"He's gone; Anthony Redvers is dead."

She spoke, and the boy was suddenly touched with fear. He turned very pale and gazed sidelong at his father.

No horror marked the expression of the dead, but rather a mild contentment. His eyes were open. He seemed to smile at the hurricane as it washed the blood off his gentle brown face.

Michael turned to his mother where she stood gazing into the eyes of the storm.

"All the same, as awful as it is, you done justice. An' God above knoweth it; an' me an' you must keep the secret from them as wouldn't understand."

He crept up close to her and touched her.

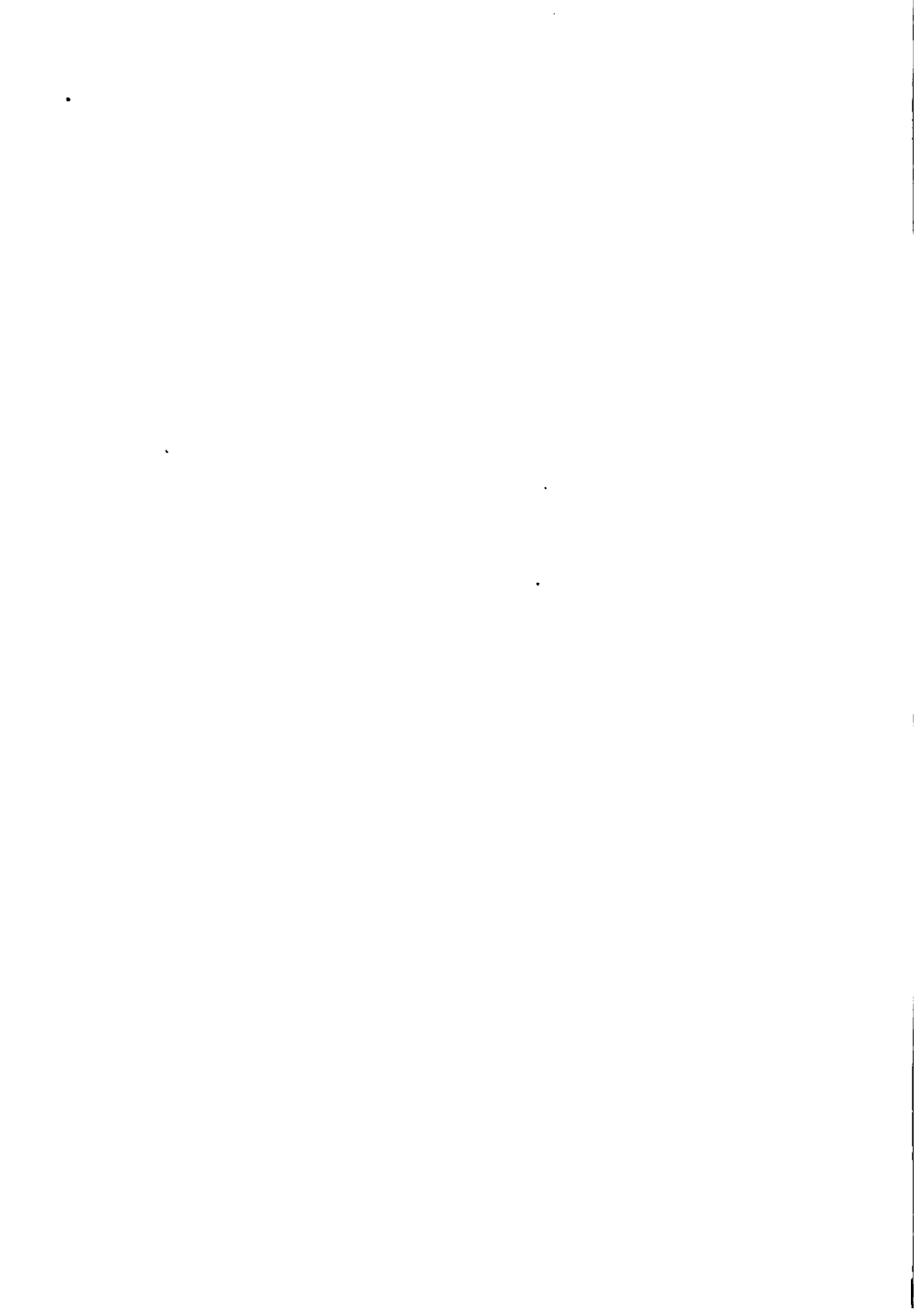




## Book II



## Book II



## CHAPTER I

### INQUEST

**J**ESSE REDVERS, with the enthusiasm of youth and the folly of ignorance, had often desired that he might chance upon great issues and plunge into some notable and thorny strait that should try him as by fire and prove him gold.

Now was his ambition granted and during the night before inquest on his father, such an ordeal as falls to the lot of few overtook him. Michael Redvers desired to know what Jesse was going to say in evidence before the coroner; and their mother was present at the conversation between her sons.

Midnight had come and gone; Nathaniel Tapp and his wife slumbered at the back of the house; locked up within the red-tiled barn lay the corpse of the dead master, while his great dog 'Spider' slept on a chain at the entrance. Dawn danced along the rugged crests of the land and granite already caught the shivering white of day; but still Ann Redvers listened and her boys spoke.

"There's no call to go over old ground any more," said Michael. "What's done is done, an' my mother counts among them great women who stick at nothing. He'm dead because he did her cruel, wicked wrong. And what are you going to do? That's all I want to know, Jesse."

The elder son perceived his dilemma. He had long anticipated it but was not prepared.

"If speech could bring back ——" he began.

"Leave that. What's the use of that stuff now? Be you going to say you saw what you saw, or not?"

Jesse looked at his mother, and Michael saw the look and clenched a great fist beneath the table.

"Christ in Heaven! that such as you should sit in judgment on us," he cried.

Ann Redvers said nothing. She was past sense and had entered upon a passive phase of mind — not indifference, but rather petrification.

"The inquest comes too soon upon this awful thing for me to decide," said Jesse. "And I don't judge — God forbid — that's not for me. As for your bitter words, Michael Redvers, you must try and allow for the difference between us. A man should honour both his parents. I'm no judge at all, only a man whose father has been — been taken off by his wife — and that wife my mother. You're all mother; your father was nought to you. I don't say I'm all father, but there was more of my father in me than my mother. My duty ——"

"Drop this maundering! Dawn'll break afore you say anything. D'you think I care a curse what you call your duty? What are you going to do about it? That's all I want to hear from you. They sit on him here at eleven o'clock to-morrow — that's a dead certainty anyway. Be you going to put a rope round my mother's neck, or ban't you? That's the simple question. If you'm so honest an' such a man for the right, tell me now. Then I'll not stop your mouth as I should like to, for love of mother; but I'll rise up this moment and take her away, and God help those who hinder us. Her life's my life; and no man will ever put a finger on her while I'm alive to stop him."

"So much for you then," answered Jesse. "Now, mother, I'm sorry, but you must speak before I do."

"I've nought to say," she answered. "I only wish as Michael would feel like you, Jesse. The minute after I done it, my heart longed and lusted to give myself up. I've prayed that Michael might be brought to see that my only chance of salvation lies there. This life's ended. But he won't see, an' if I yield myself, he'll cut short his own days. He's sworn it on the Bible. If you can get him to see different, I will bless you. My life's ended, I say, an' 'tis vain for dear Michael to dream otherwise. Henceforward, if I'm to live, 'tis only the ghost of a life, lighted by a burning lie. An' 'tis odds but my brain must break after a little of it."

"Die, and I die," said the younger brother. "Give yourself up, an' I'll take my life, for there'll be no more use for it on this earth. Now, Jesse—God A'mighty on the throne of Judgment I ought to call 'e—what be you going to do?"

"I reserve my opinion," said Jesse. "To do right be beyond my power seemingly. I don't know what is right, and that's the truth. This much wrong at least I'll do: I'll say and I'll swear to a lie. I'll tell them that I saw nought and heard nought but my mother's cry after my father had fallen."

"Swear it often enough an' you'll soon get to believe it—as I do now," said Michael calmly. "There's waking dreams as well as sleeping dreams, an' this be of 'em. Anything may happen to the mind dazed by a great storm."

"That cannot come to good, Michael," said Ann. "Cleave you to truth, or this awful evil won't stop at me. Already in your thoughts you are throwing your-



self into hell. Spare me that — spare me that — don't let me murder my own son's soul."

His brother's subtlety surprised the elder. That all might be a dream was more like an idea of Jesse's own. He mused how a single mighty love can quicken dull brains and make the slow mind swift.

"I'll say nothing more nor less than that I didn't see what I did see; and, I repeat, I reserve judgment ——"

"So long as you say nought to hurt mother, you can reserve your judgment, or speak it, or go to the devil with it. Once you've sworn ——"

"Think, Michael — afore it is too late. Your immortal soul — and Jesse's — an' maybe even mine."

"Mother, 'tis no hour for thinking, but for doing."

"You speak of death for yourself and make a great deal of it," said Jesse. "Have you not thought that I might do the like?"

"No, I haven't, because you've nothing to die for," answered his brother. "Your game's to live an' fret yourself to fiddlestrings over a bad father's memory. Then do so; an' keep your grievances to yourself."

"If you really thought for mother, you'd listen to the imploring prayer of her heart. 'Tis you be judging an' ordering — not me," answered Jesse, shifting his ground. "But I do think most solemn that this death can't go without another. We be three here an' 'tis an easy way out for me to die. You two be all the world each to t'other; an' if one was gone, the other would have nothing left to live for. But I — I might go out of it an' leave no place empty."

"An' what then?" burst out Michael. "Granted you go — no loss — but what do men say? That you knowed more than you would tell."

"Men would say I died because I didn't care to live no more without my father."

"Trash! Men don't kill themselves for their fathers. The world knows that very well."

"Yet for your mother you threaten to kill yourself."

"Only if she does the like."

"And now she will kill herself—in real earnest—kill herself by inches—for your worthless life."

Ann cried to them out of a full heart.

"Sons—sons, no more of this! If you could see what I cannot speak! If you could feel the least spark of what's burning here!"

"God He knows I feel a lot more'n I can speak too," said Michael. "Don't I love you, mother? Be there any human soul alive that loves you like me? I know you burn—if I could quench it! All the same, no fire as was ever lighted but burns out in its appointed time. Trust God Almighty to put it out—you was His minister—'twas Him made you do it."

"Peace, poor heart," she answered. "God was cruel to send such a mother as me on earth. Oh—once more—once more, my Michael boy, if you could but think an' understand as deep as Jesse does——"

"If I could—I'd go to the lime-kiln an' roast by inches to make ready for the hell fire I should earn for evermore. He's got my hate, while I can hate, for this night's work."

"He loved his father."

"Out on his father! Adulterer! 'Tis his father hath brought us all to this."

He leapt up and departed without more words. Then Jesse turned to Ann Redvers.

"Good night, dear mother," he said. "You must pray to God to roll the time fast—fast—faster'n thought or light—so as a great gap shall come between

now and then. If us could but kill our memory — if it would die —— But the end ban't yet, I'm feared. Is there aught on earth that I can do for 'e, or suffer for 'e?"

She did not answer. She knew also that clear issues were awaiting decision behind the storm of the present hour. It seemed impossible that a boy like Michael could rule her life in this awful pass; yet for the moment his authority and his threat had prevailed. He was practical and occupied with the pressing necessity of the ordeal that awaited them; and each moment made it more difficult for his mother to do the thing she fainted to do. But she knew that Michael would keep his word, and it appeared to her that his threatened death must be her own act. Out of her present weakness, therefore, she sacrificed her desire for instant atonement and expiation that his flesh might live. Her stern spirit was broken, her customary understanding obscured by the shock of her own crime. She could no longer make impartial judgment; and she would not win her own forgiveness through the way of confession and punishment, since that way meant Michael's suicide — the death of him here and hereafter. She believed that she had to make choice between his soul and her own.

Scattered men, like an irregular string of black beads, walked across the Moor upon the following day. Behind them came the coroner, in a dog-cart from Okehampton, while beside the vehicle rode one Doctor Blight of Belstone. The physician and the members of the family were the sole witnesses.

William Arscott now approached Harter Farm, and Joseph Westaway, Toby Hannaford of the 'Hearty Welcome' Inn, Joshua Bloom and the old granite

worker, Ned Pearn, were also among those twelve who constituted the coroner's jury.

Anon all were sworn and then went out into the barn, that they might behold the body of Anthony Redvers. Mr. Arscott walked first and Mr. Westaway followed him. Some among the rest were a little fearful and desired one glance over the shoulders of the others but no more; some, on the contrary, pressed forward eagerly, as though to an agreeable experience.

"Death have left little mark of pain upon him," said Arscott, who looked down without emotion at the man in his coffin. "Do you note the lines of the face, flock-master? I always knew that he was a weak chap, for all his loud voice an' big, manly frame. But others said different. Now Death do show I'm right. It be a great hand at telling the naked truth touching a man's qualities. 'Tis the trick of the countenance guided by the play of the brain that hides 'em."

"Yet there's an awful wise look upon him," argued old Pearn.

"That's the wisdom of death's self, not the man," answered Mr. Arscott.

"As good-hearted a Christian soul as ever breathed; an' he thought kindly of his race," declared old Westaway. "Many was the proper thing I've known him to do on the quiet, an' never mention. Us all liked him very well; an' if that's not a sign of strength in him, what is?"

"'Tis his good wife I be thinking of," declared Hannaford.

"No call to," answered Bloom. "Why, let alone them wage-earning young men, I hear she'm left with over a hundred and twenty pound a year, though, to be sure, such things gain by flying about. She'll stand up to it, mark me."

"They stop at Harter, however, an' that'll help to make the blow fall lighter, please God," said Mr. Westaway.

Bloom gazed stolidly upon the dead face.

"That's where the man's life went out of him — behind his ear," he said. "Well, he's over his troubles, an' almost looks as if he knowed it."

"Do the hair grow after a man dies?" whispered a labourer. "I could have sworn as Redvers never carried so much beard afore him as his carpsie do."

"Don't be a silly fool," said Arscott. "The life's out of the hair, like it is out of the man, so soon as he's gone dead. Look how limp it is. You can see his soft mouth smiling through it."

"To think that the chin of him falled away like that!" mused Toby Hannaford. "Poor dear soul — without his hair he'd be a different man."

"Not him," answered Bloom grimly. "Hair don't alter our nature, though it may help to hide it. You can change the cut of your beard, but not your heart. Weak he was — weak to foolishness; but blessed with a very wise woman in his house."

"She hid more than Anthony's beard did, I lay," said old Pearn.

"'Tis certain his marriage was the cleverest thing that ever he done," admitted Toby Hannaford.

Then Bloom spoke aside to the innkeeper and pointed where William Arscott already walked from the barn.

"Did 'e see how he eyed her when us arrived? Mark me if that man don't ax her to take him afore a year's out!"

"Depends how the money's bestowed," answered Toby. "I doubt if he'd want even such a rare piece as her if the money wasn't free for him to handle."

Then the jury drifted back to the farm ; but Joseph Westaway delayed a moment and beckoned to Joshua Bloom and Hannaford.

"A terrible masterpiece of death," he said, "an' it have turned my belly to water. I very well knowed it would ; an' so I fetched along this here pinch of spirits."

He drew a bottle from his pocket, uncorked it and drank.

"Here's peace and glory to the man — good, honest soul. Never knowed such a place as Belstone be for cutting off folks in their strength. But as for us old uns, we hang on like winter pears. Have a drop? 'Tis your own for that matter."

"I will, Joe ; for a man may drink to the dead without offence," said Toby.

He drank, wiped the mouth of the bottle and handed it to Bloom.

"Walking the golden streets now, an' all the tink-rums an' jewellery of Revelation in his eyes," said Joshua. "Yet, as a thinking man, somehow I wonder whether 'twas suicide, or whether 'twasn't."

The flock-master exclaimed with indignation.

"Shame on you to say that — in hearing of his very clay ! Haven't you got no charity, Joshua Bloom ?"

"Truth's truth," answered Bloom, handing back the bottle. "Men do kill theirselves, an' always have done. Because you an' me don't know no reason, that's no reason why Anthony Redvers didn't know no reason. I don't say 'twas so ; but I do say it might have been."

"He wasn't that sort. Now if it had been you, Joshua —" said Mr. Hannaford.

"Suicide may be murder, for the world murders many a chap as be past earning his bread," answered

the old quarryman. "If I was to do away with myself, 'twould go down in Arscott's book."

The coroner now prepared to take evidence; and since there were but four witnesses, his labours occupied a short time only. It was related, amid signs of deepest sympathy from those who heard, how Ann Redvers had seen her husband fall into the well just as her sons arrived together from the plantation; how all strove to bring him to earth again, and how that deed had been accomplished.

Doctor Blight described the nature of the injuries. Anthony Redvers had struck the side of the well in falling, and it was reasonable to suppose that he perished instantly.

Some questions were put to Jesse; and then the jury listened to a few words from the coroner before it retired into the parlour to consider a verdict.

"This is a matter as simple as it is sad, gentlemen," he said. "You've seen the well—a low parapet—too low for safety in my opinion. Remember that a storm raged, that the ground was wet, and that the deceased was more than common tall. The parapet took him low in the leg, and he slipped and lost his centre of gravity. He fell head foremost, as it seems, and unfortunately didn't fall clear but struck the side of the well with terrible force and fractured his skull. There's nothing that calls for any special comment from me. The man either died by accident; or he killed himself; or he was killed. In this case I see no room for any supposition but the first."

The jury crowded the parlour, and, since there were not chairs for all, some found seats upon the harmonium, while others had to stand. But the proceedings quickly terminated, for Arscott uttered a unanimous conclusion.

"I suppose there's no two minds among us," he said. "Death from misadventure's the word. Does any man think different?"

They were of his opinion. Then Ned Pearn spoke.

"An' I'm wishful to say that us strongly advise another three or four courses of bricks round thicky well, for fear of more accidents."

"'Tis locking the door after the steed be stolen," answered Mr. Arscott; "but that's a very common thing with coroners' juries; an' a very proper thing too, for that matter. And, by your leave, I'll also express our general sorrow and sympathy for Mrs. Redvers. Be you all agreed there?"

"And the young men," added Mr. Westaway; "'tis a tower of strength took from them likewise. Say us be sorry for them too, William."

"Fancy Billy Arscott wanting to express sorrow for anybody!" whispered Toby Hannaford to Mr. Bloom.

"Why — of course — he've got his axe to grind. An' for that matter, I dare say 'twill please her. Human nature do suck comfort from the most unlikely things — even the sympathy of a coroner's jury."

"Well, why not?" asked Toby. "Take us one at a time, we be men with hearts, like other men, even though we be rolled up for the moment into the shape of a solemn legal contrivance without any feelings."

They formulated their verdict and returned with it to the coroner.



## CHAPTER II

### THE GHOST OF PEACE

**D**ARKNESS, that suffocated as well as blinded, now rolled intolerably down upon the lives of Ann Redvers and her elder son. As for Michael, his imagination seemed not of a sort fully to apprehend this tragedy. It left him indifferent and his passions were stirred less by the death of his father than by Jesse's attitude towards it. Nevertheless, he quickly perceived that life must be impossible at Harter while relations were thus darkened between his brother and himself; therefore, greatly fearing Jesse's conclusions, he disguised his own heart as best he could and made a show of friendship. And this he did, not because he felt one spark of sympathy with the mind of the elder, but because he dreaded the future for his mother's sake, and supposed, in his simple soul, that salvation or ruin for Ann rested with Jesse.

The young men, in their scarlet coats, rode together under early dawn beneath East Mil Tor, and drove before them cattle that had wandered thither during the previous evening. Then, the range cleared, they turned towards home, and Michael spoke.

"I can't bear this no longer," he began abruptly. "You promised to say a final word, but you won't say it. You're master now an' I obey you, same as I obeyed father. But if we are to go on living together, we ought to understand each other."

"We shall never understand each other and must be content to live so," answered Jesse.

"That's no new thing speaking in general. We think different and feel different—or 'tis you do the thinking an' I do the feeling. I'm for the thing nearest an' don't look far ahead. You've got your dreams. But if you can't make dreams come true with your own right hand, it be waste of time to dream 'em. The thing is—mother."

"What of her? You always speak as if I was to be her judge. I'm not her judge."

Michael hid the gathering fire that leapt within. Of late the sound of his brother's voice, no matter what Jesse might say, had in its very intonation material for anger.

"Not her judge—no. But worse. You keep dumb while I'm starving to hear you say what you are going to do. Is it too much to ax you to decide?"

"The time runs on," said Jesse.

"For us, yes. Not for her. With all your cleverness haven't you seed that? Time's at a standstill with her. Belike she'll die of it."

"She looks like a woman being eaten alive—God help her."

Michael uttered an inarticulate sound, half sob, half curse.

"You can say that and keep cool and thoughtful! What devil's stuff be you made of?"

The problem interested Jesse.

"'Tis the thought of the moment that spins the stuff of the mind; not the mind, the thought," he said. "Sometimes there are tears in my eyes when I see our poor mother—an' then I think of father an' the tears dry; an' so the mind changes from hard to soft by the thought."

"She's gone from her beautiful straightness. Her head bends more forward than it did use to."

"If you only knew it, Michael, 'tis you, not me, that's making her grow old. There's no way out for one with her high mind and high religion but to go—to go to man——"

"You can say that—you smug-faced preacher! An' she your mother. 'Go to man'—go an' ax 'em to put a rope round her dear neck—your mother—an' buried with the murderers to Exeter gaol—your mother!"

"Peace for her—only peace. They never do the last thing. And this at least I know, that if you think she'll be happy again until she stands in the dock, you're wrong."

"He deserved it—'twas rightful vengeance—to be false to such as her! An' when I've once made her understand that she did right, she'll slowly come to happiness. Other women in the Bible have killed men an' been blessed for it."

Jesse turned away helplessly at the stupidity of his brother's mind.

"I can't argue with you," he answered. "There's nought to argue with. You talk about making our mother understand you. 'Twould be better if you used your brains trying to understand her."

"I love her—that's better than understanding. Damn such understanding as yours anyway."

"She is suffering tortures worse than you could feel. 'Tis your brutal oaths about killing yourself stand between her and the thing she wants to do."

He was silent for some time and then continued.

"We'll speak of it to her this morning. As for what I'm going to do, that's soon told. I'm going to do nothing at all but go on working here."

"Then we're friends," replied Michael promptly. "That's all I want to hear from you. We can stop — me an' her — or we can go; but if we stop, we must live without your death's-head stare in our faces, an' your sigh in our ears."

"I shall think my own thoughts as I always have. I shall go haunted with grief to my grave, Michael."

"Keep your ghosts to yourself — that's all I ax for mother. I know you loved him very well; but he's gone. You may have knowed his secrets —"

"Never — never. He've told me in his humble way that he was a very easy, erring man — no more. Though for my part I never see he done anything to merit —"

"You won't see; that's why. If you had a wife an' she played you false, wouldn't you kill her? I know I would."

"Men an' women's different. You argue so because you be still a half-growed boy — no better'n a woman yourself. An' you don't know yet what a man feels, or what it feels to be a man. Perhaps I don't neither, for that matter."

"You've said you'll do nothing. We can leave the rest for evermore. Now 'tis for us to fight to hearten her up a bit. If I had your cleverness an' my love for her, I'd do great things; but I'm such a fool. But I've got all the love — worse luck."

"I won't lie, Michael. I don't love mother as much as I pity her. Not that I ever did love her much, for when you have been ruled by fear — All the same, God knows, I've thought an' mourned for her an' sorrowed bitterly for her. So, since you'm determined, it shall be as you wish: we must think what's best for her."

Michael nodded. In his heart was hate, for his

imagination could not rise beyond the actual certainty that, but for him, Jesse would have suffered his mother to confess. Under this reflection he had long smarted, because Ann often availed herself of Jesse's implicit opinion and used it as an argument against Michael.

Secretly and by night she spoke with them; and her words won doubtful affirmatives from Jesse, from Michael always a fierce and frantic protest.

Within the space of a month the woman was physically altered. Her colour—the clear pink and brown blended of a ripe filbert—had waned to whiteness: lines only indicated until now, began to deepen and grow firmly graven. It was as though time had leapt ten years in a night; but agony rather than time wrote its language there, and the words were impressed from within and from beneath. Time, as Michael declared, stood still for her. No growing film covered her wound; no anodyne of hours, of dawns, of days was poured upon her soul; because Michael held time fast and would not let him travel onward.

Life had to be lived; for this was not a leaf that could be torn from the book of her heart; and now the page stared horribly black by day, and nightly burnt with letters of fire. No tear blotted it, no hope dimmed one detail. For ever it must brand and blaze, scorch and torture. Her yearning for death and escape took secret shapes concerning which her sons knew nothing. She passed many terrible hours out of their sight; and even now, while they talked and returned homeward, she too travelled through the dawn, sick and weary from the suffering of an ordeal.

Every instinct, familiar tradition and inherited belief called upon her trumpet-voiced to surrender her-

self and put peace, perhaps salvation, above the prayers of Michael; and this day she came very near obeying her conscience and leaving her sons for ever. Their departure to the ranges had found her waking, and from her casement unseen she watched them pass away into the faint first light of morning. And then when they were gone, she let the chill breath of earliest day touch her bosom, and lifted up dark eyes to the wonder of the sky.

Definition of dawn, sharp and pure, lightened the foreground, and there, as though Night's self had wept at that forlorn threshold, the dew glittered like a frost of silver upon the grass. Each adjacent stock and stone stood keenly forth under the light, but all the earth beyond was buried in a slate-coloured mist, that floated heavily in layers along and covered the Moor like a grey and still and waveless sea. Above it rose the broken peaks of the land all islanded, and upon the distant horizon this great vapour grew darker of hue and spread purple under the feet of the morning. Eastern skies that stretched above the cloud-bank were of deep, ineffable orange, and aloft they faded gradually into the green-gold of a chrysopræse; while westward night sank peacefully away. Aldebaran died in the dawn; Vega and Altair vanished from the kindling zenith. She watched the sun rise and saw it touch the exhalations of the earth. Then the valley mists, yielding their hearts to him, blushed, diminished and dislimned. They sank from their nightly hugeness and, waning to flakes and rosy wisps around the rose-touched granite, departed into the untarnished blue.

Ann Redvers was now fallen upon the habit of using these morning hours for thought. Like an unconscious and perfect instrument, she pursued the business of

each working day and failed of nothing in her rule and method. She ate and drank, prayed publicly on Sunday and preserved the face of calm and resigned widowhood; but at early dawn she awoke to consciousness, at fall of eve she returned to the company of her heart.

Now she rose, dressed quickly, went out and let her feet lead her. Sometimes she climbed a hill at these hours and sat hidden in the boulders near the crown of it; sometimes she found herself in a hollow at streamside and sat where miners of old had washed for tin; to-day she moved under Halstock, then, waking from the trances of thought, stood almost aghast beside the broom patch and stared around her, as though some vision magical and unfamiliar had opened out of the morning. The yellow flowers were dead, and, against dark summer green, a thousand dry, black seed-pods hung and shrilled like the chirrup of crickets. They rattled together with many tongues and tinkled the music of 'Widcombe Fair.' It rose huskily out of them like the ghost of song, or the chime of those bells that ring in a sick man's ear alone and have no outward agent. She shook her head and listened again; but the broom pods played on.

Suddenly fear fell upon her, for she knew that if the ear hears what is not, the eye may presently see what is not also.

"'Tis coming," she thought. "To see him arise—arise an' speak! And what he speaks, that afore God will I do; for his ghost shall be more to me than even Michael's live body."

From dread at the thought of such an awful experience, she turned to an intense longing for it, and a conviction that such a revelation might point the road to peace. The thought thus sprung haphazard from

her soul, terribly attracted her. Without words, she prayed in spirit that she might be permitted to see her husband. As the living, since conscious existence dawned, have vainly called upon their loved or outraged dead, have vainly petitioned that desired or dishonoured ghosts might rise, with one promise or message, one word of forgiveness, one look of love ; so now there came to this woman a dumb and yearning frenzy to kneel and to plead before that shadow.

A brief delirium overtook Ann. She stood there under deepest mental excitation, fired with the seer's fever. But she saw nothing and heard nothing more than the morning wind and the lark aloft. The songs of many birds broke from Halstock Wood ; the broom pods ceased their music, and she returned to herself.

At such moments as these, necessities more terrific than her son's fate got hold upon her and wrestled with her. She was awfully concerned for her soul and believed that this sustained falsehood, called life, must mean unceasing torment when the few years had rolled to end it. Michael scarcely lost sight of his mother, and each night before he left her, it was his rule secretly to make her promise that she would do nothing against herself while he slept. That she suffered ceaselessly he fought to forget or not to know ; but darkness invariably lighted up the theatre of her torment, and often she tramped her chamber while all else slumbered and the sun marked his journey back to the East with silver beneath the dark horizon.

And now the dawn song of those unconscious seeds marked new physical symptoms and woke a new terror for Ann Redvers. She argued subtly with herself that this might mean madness. And if madness rose between her and her just punishment, then in the world to come, where none is mad, she would stand



before the Judge with a murder unexpiated; and so her soul must be damned for ever and not saved.

"I mustn't go mad — that dooms me!" she said aloud, and sat upon a rock and stared down at Oke where it flowed and foamed over the granite slide in the valley. "Not mad. I must give myself up before that comes — else no ray of hope is left for me. Michael — loving, loving heart — if only ——"

Then burst upon her the sudden impulse already recorded. There came a thought, almost a resolution, to fly, to give herself up, to place bars and bolts between herself and Michael. That done, he would come to know through long grief that both their souls were saved.

She made haste until she reached the high ground above Okehampton; then her feet slowed and she stopped and stood and looked upon that little grey town clasped in a green valley, like a bird sleeping upon her nest. Ann watched the smoke rise up from a hundred hearths. It lifted and mingled and made a cloud of incense above many homes. She thought of what the day had brought to all those waking mothers and men, maidens and children. A fleeting flash from the past showed her two tiny boys, and she remembered how the little things had sat together and eaten their breakfasts with clatter of spoon on bowl through the many mornings of babyhood. She heard their father laugh and felt the old, contented smile upon her own mouth. Then a great, soundless cry broke out from the springs of her heart. To think of Michael other than alive; to dream of his loving eyes shut, his deep voice stilled. Faith turned pale and faltered, while Life for that moment claimed a victory. The broken mother went homeward, hungry to see him and touch him and hear his voice. He never knew

all that she had endured. He never understood the unwonted frenzy of her kiss when he rushed to welcome her return. For once she was later than her sons, and Michael already fumed with anxiety and impatience.

"Never you do this again," he whispered. "You don't know what I've been through this last hour."

After breakfast, when Mr. Tapp and his wife were gone about their business, Jesse spoke and repeated to Ann the substance of what had passed between him and his brother upon the ranges. Then he proceeded, went much further than he had thought to go, and astounded Michael with his decision.

"Mother," he said, "rightly enough Michael has axed me to tell out and end this coil, so much as a helpless man may do. And I've spoke with him, and this is what I've said to myself since. I shall see as Michael sees henceforth."

She sighed.

"'Tis his love has blinded you then, Jesse, not your sense that fails. I'm what I am, an' 'twas one comfortable sorrow, amid all the shattering terror and grief of my life, that you accused me with every look, an' wasn't blinded, an' knew the awful woman that is your mother. To have my guilt in your eyes was a sort of punishment. I sought it every day an' hoped in a vain, foolish fashion that it might help to lessen the mountain of punishments waiting. But how be I to live under your forgiveness an' even a show of love? The love of my boys — the love of my boys — yet ban't your poor mother's soul nought to you children? Don't neither of you love her deep enough to save her?"

"Trust God Almighty with your soul," said Jesse. "It's not for us — you're our mother ——"

Michael suddenly leapt up, took his brother's hand and gripped it with all his strength. The pressure that crushed Jesse's fingers also served to keep down his brother's tears. But Michael's voice shook as he made utterance.

"'Tis God speaking in you — He've showed you your duty; an' may He judge me if I don't look up to you an' honour you an' trust you from this day! You'm only second to her now."

Jesse nodded, while Ann stared helplessly upon them but said no word. Neither did her sons speak again. The young men separated upon this understanding and each went to his work.

And their mother also turned to fulfil her daily round; but in her heart began a blind search for a new road, and a wondering if the conscious creature can plan its own punishment and work out its penance under the eye of God alone without cognisance of man or angel.

"There are things that us could wish He might hide from His own Son," she thought, "an' this be one of them."

Religion drifted now into this solemn shape for her, and she developed a longing to fall upon some thorny and cruel road whereon she might endure torment unseen.

For a moment her desire to give herself up to man abated, since that was easy. Instead, an extended but hidden life of suffering rose to be her ambition. In the busy planning of long-drawn tortures, her real misery unconsciously decreased for the time.

## CHAPTER III

### COMPOUND INTEREST

**S**ALOME WESTAWAY collected her baskets and put her stall at Okehampton market in order. The day was done and with the exception of a brace of ducks and half a dozen little bunches of flowers, she had sold all her stock. Now she flung the withering nosegays aside, took the ducks to a poulterer, whose shop stood near the market-place, and then joined her father.

In a spring cart they climbed the hill homeward, and Mr. Westaway addressed his daughter about a personal affair. The flock-master's private concerns now entered upon a somewhat critical stage, for the first instalment of his interest on William Arscott's loan was about to fall due, and, much to his astonishment, old Joseph perceived that he would be quite unable to meet it. For the moment, however, his thoughts were upon another matter, and he regarded Salome with affection and some disquiet.

"No less than three different parties axed me this day if all was well with you, my dear. They thought as it couldn't be, for it seemed you'd growed so pale as a wild rose; an' one woman went so far as to name the name of Harry Bates. I do hope and trust that you didn't——?"

"Care for him? Not me, father."

Mr. Bates, the wild son of tame parents, had been a

frequent visitor at the Westaway stall when Salome went to market. Indeed, many and many a fine, red-necked young man, with old-fashioned whiskers, long grey leggings and dashing fashion of neck-cloth and breast-pin, might there be seen on market days when their business more properly called them to the cattle-pens. Salome had numerous admirers, and some of the gossips, noting her more demure and silent than usual, connected this incident with the sudden departure to Canada of the young man, Bates. Others, however, suspected that straitened circumstances at home sat heavily on the girl's heart and clouded her eyes.

"When he went away — Bates I mean — the country-side was the gainer, in my opinion — to say it without unkindness," declared Mr. Westaway, "though if I thought you'd ever had a soft corner for him, it would be different. But you never did like the boys. I've heard you say yourself you couldn't abide the male sex afore it had turned thirty years old. Still, be it as it will, there's no doubt you've grown more than common downdaunted of late."

"Don't think it. Harry Bates was nought to me, or any like him. I'm well enough — never better."

They came to the shoulder of the hill and alighted. Presently Salome stopped to pick up a little parcel that had fallen from her hand. She dusted it carefully and was about to follow her father when an acquaintance, coming down the road, held her in conversation for a moment and Mr. Westaway proceeded alone.

His pony, pulling strongly, was already some distance ahead of him when the old man passed a blind beggar-woman led by a little girl.

The child, skilful in such matters, noted a cheerful countenance and lifted her voice to it with the usual parrot petition.

"Dear, kind gentleman, faither's dead, an' mother's blind, an' three more childer to home, an' God knows where our next bite of bread be coming from. Just a copper, kind, generous sir — for my poor mother."

Joseph puffed out his cheeks.

"Poor soul — poor soul! — such a young woman too — an' no light ——"

He looked behind him and saw Salome still in conversation. Then he dived for his leathern purse, took out sixpence, thrust it into the child's hand and hurried after the cart.

But it was Salome, not her father, who heard the little girl's loud thanks and the blind woman's blessing. She guessed well what it meant, hardened her heart and spoke desperately. Her nature of late was strung to an added strength by sorrow; and she found herself able to do things that she had never accomplished when her spirit was happier.

"I'm very sorry to ax you for that money back. My old man yonder is not responsible for what he does. He's got no money of his own at all. I'm his darter an' his keeper too. He slipped ahead of me, else I wouldn't have let him do it."

The child became frightened and the afflicted woman grew defiant.

"A pretty story! How do I know you ban't a beggar yourself?" she said. "There's many about as would rob the blind for that matter."

"I'm very sorry to ax," answered Salome, "but we'm poorer than you for all our pony-cart. You at least are free; we are deep in debt. 'Twasn't the old man's money."

"He only gived me a sixpence — God's my judge if it was more," said the small girl eagerly. "You can see for yourself, miss, if you like. That's all our tak-

ings since morning—two sixpences, an' a thre'p'my piece, an' thirteen coppers."

"Keep it then," said Salome. "I thought it had been a great deal more. He's so generous if his heart's touched."

She hurried forward and joined her father.

"I do hope you wasn't too kind to that poor creature," he said earnestly as soon as she reached him. "'Tis quite right for the likes of us—with roofs over our heads an' good money in our pockets—to be tender to the sufferings of such as her; but I done what was right—little enough, too, worse luck! 'Twas like your kind heart to stop afore them empty eye-holes; still, to be honest about it, I'd found a spare sixpence afore you'd comed up."

"A 'spare sixpence'! How many spare ones be there in your purse, father?"

"Well, well—words may feed the heart, but they can't fill the stomach; an' nowadays—anyway our troubles look small enough afore hers. No light—poor soul."

"Shall you call on Mr. Arscott going home along?"

"I mean to do it. I'm in a firm vein. You can take on the cart from Belstone, an' I'll drop in upon the man and drink a dish of tea with him."

"Almost a pity you don't wait till to-morrow for Barbara."

"Not at all," answered Mr. Westaway with determination. "In high matters of money Barbara's not clever enough—too blunt an' comes to the point too quickly. Where money's the matter, you must beat about the bush and use craft. Besides, she worrits Arscott. When she's there, his little eyes screw into her bosom like a pair of gimlets, an' he thinks of all he's lost, an' gets nasty in his temper. I'll see him

alone, an' I'll be back presently with the news — There walks Mrs. Tapp. Us'll give her a lift."

Sarah Tapp had also been to Okehampton, and carried an empty basket on each arm.

"A good market," she said; "and I hope you found it so."

"Very — very. 'Tis always good when Salome's shopwoman. But the next but one is going to make a man of me, ma'am," declared the flock-master. "I could wish," he continued, "as I'd got more things to sell; yet such as they be, they'm beauties. A picture, the ewes — eh, Salome? An' some brave young rams, as would fetch prizes anywhere this side of London, if I could find money to show 'em."

"Well, I hope 'twill be all you say an' better," answered Mrs. Tapp amiably.

"And how is it with Harter, ma'am? Be the missis bending under her yoke? I pray time is softening the sad loss an' bringing a thought of happiness, or promise of it."

"Mrs. Redvers was never over-much of a happy woman," answered Sarah Tapp. "Wonnerful stuff she'm forged of. Secret tears leave her eyes aching — for that much other eyes can mark. Tears enough, I'll warrant you; but none ever sees her shed 'em or wipe them away. We go on just the same. The work's done; but the life an' youth be out of the house — buried with Redvers. We'm all growing old the quicker for his passing. An' none of his pleasant noise, an' whistling, an' jokes, an' kind voice axin' after my bad leg."

"A large-hearted man, with love to spare for every fellow-creature as begged for it. I'm very glad he lies where he do; for 'tis fit his mound should be where the sun can find it. I be going to offer to help buy



the stone presently — not, of course, as there'll be any need of a subscription, or any such thing; but I'm going to ax Mrs. Redvers to let me an' my darters have a pound in it for sheer love, because us all thought the world of him — didn't us, Salome?"

The girl sat at the back of the cart with her face turned away from her father. She looked along the empty road and made some sort of inarticulate sound in answer to his question.

Then Belstone was reached and Mr. Westaway soon entered the dwelling of his creditor, while Salome walked up to the Moor beside the pony-cart. Presently Mrs. Tapp also alighted and went her way with many thanks, and a little further along the road, where furzes grew and the rough track to Watchett Hill Farm was hidden, Jesse Redvers appeared and stood beside Salome. She showed no surprise, for he had come by appointment; and now he went to the pony's head, stroked its nose and expressed open gratification that the driver was alone. A moment later they stood together and shook hands.

"Hast brought it for me?" he asked; and she nodded.

"'Tis here. A girl I know to Medland's shop sewed it; an' now I'll put it on for 'e. I've a needle an' thread on purpose."

She produced her little paper parcel and drew from it a black circle of cloth. He glanced at it and nodded, but spoke of other matters.

"I can't think what's come over you this year. Your beautiful eyelids be always down now — like a daisy's petals that shut over its eye by night — I wish 'twas for love of me."

She looked up as he spoke and regarded him wistfully.

"Life's difficult an' I can't take kindly to it — not of late days. I've nought to trust to — I don't suffer easy like father — I don't believe in all he can."

"Believe in me! Oh, if you could! Why should you suffer at all?"

"What a question to ax a growed woman! But I'll tell you. I miss your father. You'll laugh — yet 'tis true — I miss him more'n anybody might dream. Somehow I like to tell you so. He always had a kind word for me. Did you notice that?"

Jesse sank from cheerful animation to sudden lethargy.

"Well he might — dear father. He knowed what was perfect when he seed it. If — but don't talk to me of him. I can't stand it even yet. Not yet — I must forget. You stare, but I'm sober serious. I *want* to forget — forget the little, kind, loving, maddening things, so small in themselves, yet like links of a chain of love to me. I want just to call him home as a great shadow, that came between my childhood's days an' the sun when 'twas too hot for me, an' the rain when it beat too cold. But the rest — all the small, daily, countless things — let 'em go — I can't abide to dwell on them. They hurt too cruel. They make life one long pain. I try to stop the ways of thought by crushing my head between my hands, an' wish I could burst it so."

She looked at him and he saw, to his surprise, that he had much moved her, for her breast heaved. Once he thought she was going to speak; but she did not trust herself to do so.

She mastered her throat at last and said in a whisper, "'Tis your left arm — hold it out."

A sudden, wild longing to tell Salome the truth woke in some secret place of Jesse's heart. He

yearned sometimes with frantic desire to share his load. The thought oppressed him terribly now before her sad, sympathetic face; and he felt the words on his tongue, like live things struggling to be born into speech. He fought down the emotion and, even as he did so, marvelled that it could rise. She drew the mourning band over his sleeve and quickly stitched it to his coat between the shoulder and elbow.

"'Tis something, but white compared to the blackness inside of me, Salome."

She nodded and stitched on.

"I'm glad you're going to wear it."

"But I'm doubtful what Michael will say."

"His father never—at least, he never cared for his father same as you did. You knew him. Only a woman could have knowed him better than you did."

"Don't think that. None knew him so close as me."

She finished her sewing and bent her lips to his shoulder and bit the thread. For a second her bright hair was under his eyes and he lifted his hand and touched.

She felt the light caress and started back.

"I'm sorry—I couldn't help it. You was never so close to my body before. I seem to have nobody but you in the world, Salome; an' yet 'tis only a ghost of a thought, for I've got nobody less than I've got you really."

"How you can think of such things—an' him in the pit."

"Don't dream I love him less, or suffer less for loving you. Seeing your head on my arm, there comed the glory of the thought of what 'twould be to keep it there."

"I ban't any good to any living man," she said.

"No lip shall ever touch mine; no voice ever make

love to me. Yet that is not because I hold myself of poor account neither; for them as knowed far, far better'n me have taken joy in me."

Jesse looked jealously at her.

"D'you think I don't know that? 'Tis a damnable joke at Okehampton market, that when a man's to be found, they go to your stall. You'll marry a gentleman so like as not."

She shook her head.

"No call to growl an' flash your eyes. Think of your father more. 'Tis a thought to banish small hopes or fears. Did you see them mary-lilies on his grave Sunday? Barbara an' me put 'em there. I went to church only for that. I never go now."

"I saw 'em, an' mother saw 'em, an' wondered. I guessed 'twas you but said nought. Oh, Sally, sweet—if you could only love me. You'm sad an' sorry an' the world bears down hard on you too. Our sore hearts might be a plaster for one another—if——"

He caught her hand and the needle that it held pricked him and drew blood.

"If you would stab me to the heart and kill me," he said, "I'd mind death little enough. Often, down to the old quarry under Halstock, where 'tis so lonely and so still, I've thought what a simple matter—to jump over an' make an end of it."

"You'd do wise to work harder and think less," she said.

He took the needle from her hand and stuck it into his coat.

"I'll keep that—somehow it knits you to me an' reminds me of father too—the two that in all the world I loved best."

His thought revolved back to the old desire.

"Oh, if we was one—one to the very core of our

hearts — you an' me — to share every secret — every thought. What a load off a man's soul !”

“I've got my griefs too; but I'd shame to share 'em. Let go my hand. You ban't mourning true for your father, else there'd be no room for this talk.”

“Don't say that. 'Tis his death have done it. Can't you understand a son like me, as thought all the world of him — made him my God? An' then — gone like a sunset. 'Tis as though a dam fell on a mill-race suddenly. All that rushing love with nought to do no more. So it runs into my love for you, Salome, and doubles it. I tell you that I only want to live because you'm alive. Religion's nought to me — all dry ashes.”

“There's your mother to love. Be Michael's pity enough for her, that you don't name her? Yet, somehow we'm the sort as do die together, you an' me. I've seed little bits in the papers sometimes — a man an' woman locked close — the cold clay of 'em. An' their tale told, but not to the living. An' if they found us so, they'd say us went for love of each other instead of for love of — Lord, what nonsense the heart will talk when it runs low !”

Jesse was startled.

“Die together! What a thought! You so lovely, with all your life afore you to live an' love in! 'Tis my dark, restless wretchedness be clouding you. I'll keep away an' plague you no more. Don't you give over church-going neither. 'Tis fatal for a woman.”

“Work,” she said. “Work your fingers to the bone. Work till your flesh aches and makes you forget your heart-ache. I speak what I know, for I've had experiences in my time. I often long for winter to freeze me to the marrow. That's healthy too — There's father on the road. He've been along with Mr. Arscott. I didn't expect him yet awhile.”

Mr. Westaway approached and they turned from their standpoint in the furze and greeted him.

"Ah, what be you young folk after? Oh, I see — a right an' sober thought."

He banished his smile and looked at the badge of mourning on Jesse's arm.

"Surely it took longer to settle William Arscott?" inquired Salome.

"It took just no time at all," answered her father with great gratification. "William's a good fellow. Never was a more understanding or kind-hearted man. But he hides his goodness. 'Tis for old men like me — deep read in human nature — to find it. Out I comed with the matter in my rough way; but never a muscle of his face moved, an' the corners of his mouth didn't go down by a hair. 'Can't pay at Michaelmas, Bill, an' that's the truth,' I said. 'Why for not, Mr. Westaway?' he axed. 'For the same reason pigs can't fly: haven't got the needful,' I answered him. 'Well, my dear man, if you can't, you can't,' he says in a simple, sensible word. 'Must let it run, if you please,' I said; an' he seed I was firm as a rock an' meant every syllable of it. 'If it must run — it must run, Mr. Westaway,' answers Arscott; 'you'll pay when you can, so all's said.' He spoke just so civil an' mild as a chap beating down a thing to market. 'I'm glad you're that reasonable, William,' I told him. 'Of course between man and man there must be proper give and take,' he says; 'an' I hope after sheep-market that you'll find yourself with lots of cash to the good.' 'An' so do I,' I answers him. Then he comed out to the 'Hearty Welcome' an' had a drink along with me as free an' friendly as Jesse here might, or any other man. An' not another word of unpleas-antness between us."

"You managed him very clever, I'm sure," declared Jesse.

"Well — I did. 'Tis surprising how quick the world meets you, if you'm only firm an' show you mean to have your way."

"What about the payments gathering up compound interest against you if you don't meet them, father?" asked Salome.

Joseph flipped his fingers in the air contemptuously.

"What females do think of! I wish you an' your sister would get larger-minded, my dear. Why, the man never so much as mentioned documents! 'Twouldn't have been at all a proper thing at such a time. He'll let all that bide till after ewe-market. I saw it in his face an' took his meaning in a delicate way — as becomes a man of honour. We'm both that, I hope. In fact, the world's used me very well to-day an' I thank God for it. Now us'll bid you 'good evening,' Jesse; unless you'll come home an' share supper?"

"Better not to-night," decided Salome; and young Redvers nodded and went his way.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ANNIVERSARY

**I**T happens with human affairs, as with those of the natural world, that their progress seems sometimes suspended for long periods and then, released as from a spell of sleep or passivity, speeds onward with acceleration. Events suddenly succeed each other swiftly and the wheel of change quickens its revolutions. The un-charted sand-bar wrecks a ship; the atoll sets the breaker foaming where once deep waters rolled; the cliff-face falls with a crash; the man dies. The inertia is never real, but inevitable accumulation, disintegration or attrition remains hidden and can only be perceived in the light of the next revelation. A period of apparent latency overtook Harter Farm and those who dwelt therein; but invisible development proceeded until the inward germination produced outward growth.

Ann Redvers existed through twelve months of her widowed life, and her secret penances left no visible sign. First, after the immemorial way of the religious but unimaginative sinner, she had sought peace in self-torture and attacked her body with physical hurts. But her soul laughed at them, and soon she discovered how nothing in that sort, less than such suffering as might strike at life, could comfort her spirit. Therefore she allowed her hidden wounds to heal.

Time taught her that the real torment of life was



sustained living. The desire to endure and atone departed from her, for she perceived its vanity. Her own inner wish was to die and face that awful and eternal worst she now accepted as her due.

Monthssped; Winter returned and departed; Spring, with sure, soft hand, laid little flowers upon the desolate waste and greater ones within the denes and dingles; the anniversary of Anthony's death fell on a gentle day in June.

His name was rarely uttered now save by the lips of Sarah Tapp; yet, despite their understanding, a cloud still hung between Michael and Jesse, and their silence did not mean peace. Sometimes the darkness lifted; sometimes it grew in density; sometimes a chill, nameless aversion or distrust haunted their hearts for many days and kept them apart. Ann Redvers understood it better than her sons. No small grief for her centred in this situation. She read Jesse vividly and knew how that he too dwelt in the past, despite his tremendous efforts to busy his hands with the present and his mind with the future. She saw his spirit in his eyes. He grew physically more like his father, and she vainly fancied that, had fate fallen differently, Jesse might have developed his father's contented and joyous nature too. Gloomy he was, however, and Michael perceived the circumstance also, but accounted for it otherwise. In his belief disappointed love sufficed to explain his brother's darkness. He knew that Jesse wanted to marry Salome Westaway and that she had refused him.

Now, upon this return of his father's death day, Ann explained his mistake to her younger son.

In a leisure hour that chanced after dinner, the mother asked Michael to come upon the Moor with her; and she walked beside him there, through weather that offered full contrast to the hurricane hours of the pre-

vious year. Then Michael found a mossy stone, and spread his coat upon it for her, and sitting beside her, lighted his pipe.

"Did you mark that Jesse went off first thing after breakfast?" she asked.

"I did so. Why?"

"Somehow I knowed that he would — to spend the time alone."

"But why to-day?"

"Don't you remember? I thought I seed in your face this morning that you did — same as he did. But perhaps 'twas my own thought that put the fancy there."

"To-day is Wednesday — that's all I know about it."

"'Tis the day he died, Michael — the day that numbered me —"

"Let that lie — leave it — forget it! I did hope and pray you was forgetting. You'm a slave to your own memory; yet you'm too grand to be a slave to anything. I'm forgetting fast, because I make myself forget. An' Jesse's forgetting."

"Jesse forgetting! Don't you think that. It's gnawing at him, same as it is at me. Don't fool yourself to think that even you can forget either."

"Jesse's found time to go courting, anyway. If he loved you same as me —"

"But he does, my son. He's so gentle. He knows all that's working inside me."

Michael dashed away his clay pipe, leapt to his feet and strode restlessly up and down in front of his mother. Anger flushed his face. He walked backward and forward, turning sharply as though an invisible cage limited his progress on either hand. Great silence fell. The fearless swifts darted so close to them that Ann could hear the gentle sound of their feathers in the air and see their soot-coloured plumage and shining eyes.

"Haven't you suffered enough — far, far above your deserving?" he asked. "An' if Jesse — by look or sigh or silence — keeps this thing before you, he's a damned coward. 'Tis his place to hold you up and fill your mind with other thoughts, as I try to do. You've made your peace with God — though, since father wronged you so cruel, 'twas but carrying out God's own justice. An' you never meant even that — never; an' I thought, touching Jesse, 'twas because Salome Westaway wouldn't look at him that he'd growed so acid an' dumb of late. But now I see; an' I say he's a cruel coward to pull that long face — if you be right, mother."

"He can't help it. How well do I know what he feels. He'm like me — yearning — yearning to do something. Only I know what to do; he doesn't."

"More shame to him. You — yes, I know you would give yourself up to-night but for me," he said bitterly.

She did not answer immediately, though anon she determined to speak.

"I've tried for to punish myself, Michael. I can tell you that much. I've bent under secret rods; but 'twas vain. The punishment is that I am 'alive — that I go on an' don't pass away a day sooner. God only knows what it is to me to see each morning dawn."

Michael lifted up his voice and poured out curses against his brother.

"If I could use words that would wither his eyes out of his head — them iron-stone coloured eyes, always roaming round, an' looking away when you catch 'em, an' talking without words! You're right an' I was wrong. 'Tis him that's a green wound — 'tis him that keeps my father walking afore your eyes,

like a ghost from the grave. You see so much, mother; why don't you see that too? You blame me—not him—me that would cut my throat to save you a pang—me—me. I love you better'n you love me—by God I say I do! Didn't I fight for you when you was like a madwoman an' meant to do away with yourself? For that's what you did mean, when you wanted to go down to the police-station. Oh, if you knowed how I love you—if you knowed half I love you. Ban't I somebody too? Ban't my fight to make you happy to count for anything? Do I look at you with eyes like a judge?"

"He can't help it; he'm built so."

"God keep me from unbuilding him! Leave him—leave him an' turn your back on this infernal place an' come along with me. Or I'll go—could you bear that? Shall I go an' leave you with Jesse?"

"Don't rage against him."

"No, I'll never go. He'd hale you to prison if my back was turned. He would—I'll stake my life he would—for his own cold-blooded viper's peace—not for yours. He wants to kill you—an' he is killing you—killing you by creeping inches. I ban't deceived an' never will be again. An' you say that I be your penance; that 'tis he that understands—not me; that my thought an' love an' worship for my dear, dear mother be all in vain. By God, that's worse than killing father, an' I don't care a curse whether I live or die, if you think that."

"You be almost the only living thing that loves me," she said. "You'm life itself—I only go on for you; you'm the heart in my breast and the breath in my nostrils. Your good's my good, your grief's my grief; else I wouldn't be here now. Don't you know it? Right well you do." She held out her arms to him

and he turned and came to her side and gripped her hands and pressed them against himself.

"I wonder you allow so much as that, though I know you think 'tis the truth. All the same, I'm not a fool an' I feel that we can't bide like this another year. If the man's always going ghost-haunted same as this, the sooner we clear out of Harter the better, I say."

"Things may happen to him — things that'll help him to forget. If he was to take a wife ——"

"I pity her."

"If he was to go back to church Sundays. 'Tis months since he went now ——"

They sat long and presently Mrs. Redvers spoke again.

"Michael, forgive me for hurting you so," she said. "Lad, us'll talk a little now an' again to see how our souls be growing — if you will for love of me. What a woman! Who knows out of all this torment — who knows but that doing as you wish after all, despite my fears, I be doing as God wishes?"

"Because it hurts you worse than anything else could, you say that," he answered with exceeding grief in his voice. "Well, I don't care if it is so. I know my heart if you don't. Believe it so; I can suffer it — so long as you be here free for me to fight for. But you don't think that what you say be true, for all you'd like to."

She clasped her hands closer upon his.

"To say I've been sent as your penance an' punishment! 'Tis a hard saying; but no matter; I'll stand that an' more than that, mother."

"It isn't so — I don't believe it, though I said it, Michael. Your way is not the Lord's, an' I won't fool myself to think it can be."

"You've promised to abide by my way, however."

"Yes, I have promised."

"Then, bad son as I be, I'll keep you to it," he cried. "Never will I give way. I'll stand here for justice while I can. I believe in God too—though Jesse turns his back on church—an' I be doing what God tells me is my duty."

"Ax Him again—every day. Ax an' pray that He'll show you what's right an' bless you an' be good to you—if 'tis only for the wonderful love you bear your wicked mother, Michael."

He dropped her hand and leapt up.

"This talk will drive me mad," he said. "I can't stand no more of it. I shall curse my Maker, or do some evil thing, in a moment. Rise up an' come home, mother. Me your thorn—me your punishment! An' him with his blasted, burning eyes——"

Far away in the central loneliness Jesse wandered through the sunshine upon the Moor's deep bosom.

Salome's advice had been precious and helped him to escape from intellectual strife by the way of physical struggle. He toiled mightily and worked in a way to amaze even Michael. But upon this day he took rest and held communion with his father's spirit and his own.

There had stolen into his mind a belief that his personal uneasiness, partially stilled by physical exhaustion though it might be, must argue a wrong attitude. He believed that he was thus tormented because he fell far short of duty. A voice, as loud as it was indistinct, ceaselessly called to him. He longed to do; but he knew not what to do. Only the routine of tremendous labour deadened his emotion by way of weariness. The plough became his first friend; the

share, as its slow and glittering steel tore the earth into a wave, magnetised him; the day's work — seen at a glance in a succession of parallel lines scored upon the face of a field — brought a sort of dull peace. He continued wretched above all men that he had ever known; wretched in his soul; wretched in his love; wretched in a yearning, futile desire to tell what he knew and to learn his duty from some wiser creature than himself. To speak upon this theme often grew into a giant longing, and he had to fight to master it. The thought of being an informer did not horrify him; only when he reflected upon his mother the thirst for a confidant grew weaker. And yet he was very sure that she would never blame him if he could meet a sympathetic spirit, wise and human and versed in the hidden ways of the heart. He knew no such spirit. When he thought upon any individual as recipient of his bosom secret, the futility of confession became apparent; and he was thankful for it.

## CHAPTER V

### MR. ARSCOTT TELLS HIS INCOME

SOON after the anniversary of the death of Anthony Redvers, Mr. Arscott, the stone-dealer, arose as usual and entered upon a toilet the reverse of usual. Although a working day in middle week, he disdained the garments worn overnight and from his chest-of-drawers drew a suit of grey tweeds. The cut was ancient, but the clothes were new. He shaved and washed with more than customary care. He looked to his nails, which was not an operation of every day; he donned clean linen; he produced a new necktie from a piece of paper. It was of a dark cherry-red with little yellow stars scattered over it. Then he strapped on new yellow leggings and put a hard hat in readiness. He hesitated between his ash sapling and umbrella, but, deciding for the second, drew it carefully from a case and laid it beside the hat.

During his breakfast he fell into a deep fit of abstraction and made a poor meal. He answered two letters, went into his parlour, stood behind the window curtain for some time and watched the ancient Pearn cutting granite. Then he learned the time and heaved a sigh. It was scarcely eight o'clock, but he had set the ordeal that awaited him for eleven.

He tapped the weather-glass, wandered into his garden and saw a hawk wheeling high over the hen-roost. Here was occupation, and he returned to the house,



etched his gun and, hiding behind a peat-stack, waited to get a shot. But his usual patience had this day deserted him. He fired at the bird too soon and knew that it was out of range even as he did so. The hawk departed without hurt and Arscott, regretting a wasted charge, went indoors again. Presently he picked up *The Western Morning News*, a journal that he received one day late for twopence a week by arrangement with Toby Hannaford of the 'Hearty Welcome.' But he found himself in no mood for reading. His own immediate affairs and hopes were sufficient for him. He put down the paper and looked at a glittering oleograph for inspiration. Then his lips moved and he began to speak softly.

"I be a man of some stake in the world, as you might say. Solid money and figures that would rather stagger Belstone if it knowed 'em. A very good man too — God-fearing an' sound as a nut, an' easy to lead as a child —"

He broke off and shook his head impatiently.

"No — that won't do. How did I say it last night when I was in bed? It came a lot better. I ought to have written it down."

He frowned and his little eyes almost disappeared under their bushy red and grey eyebrows.

"I be a solid man an' a plain dealer; an' you'll hear nought against me from any honest party. — That's better."

He repeated the words; then pursued his own thoughts silently.

"If I only knowed what she'd answer, I'd be ready for her. When I axed Barbara Westaway, no doubt I said a thought too much about her being a pauper. They can't stand truth, poor toads — not even from a man who offers to marry 'em. But this here woman

understands men an' marriage both. An' I lay she knows nearly so well as I do that money's the only grease to make life go smooth, for all the fools' talk against it. A saving woman herself for that matter. You can read it in her face."

He sank into reflections on the nature of her wealth and the sort of investments that Ann Redvers might have been expected to make.

"She'd err on the side of caution for sartain," he thought. "It might be my pleasing task to lift her regular income up a bit and re-invest capital."

The idea reminded him of some property and he returned to *The Western Morning News* and studied affairs of finance.

"A half up on Monday," he said.

Suddenly a great inspiration brought him on to his feet.

"Why for shouldn't I tell her what I be worth! Figures is better than twaddle about love when a man's past fifty an' a woman well on that way. Better far — an' easier far to the likes of me. She's got sense enough for a parish too. No silly softness there — an' never was. Yet — how if I told her an' she said 'no' after all? Then them figures would be all round the country very like. 'Twould have to be a condition that she didn't tell — on her honour."

He tapped his front teeth and pursued the subject. A conviction grew within him that mention of the money would decide Mrs. Redvers. He sat down again, then rose and killed a bluebottle that annoyed him with its buzzing.

Presently he descended upon trivial details and wondered whether he should or should not wear gloves. Gloves upon a weekday indicated position in a man. Therefore he went again to his bedroom

and got a pair. They were of dogskin and he noticed that their colour nearly matched his tie.

The church clock struck and, thinking that the hour was ten, William Arscott tightened his lips, said "Now for it!" and started.

At the top of the hill, as Harter hove in sight, he looked at his watch and discovered his mistake, for it was but ten minutes past nine. Therefore he turned away to his granite quarries under Belstone Tor and spent half an hour with Joshua Bloom. The apparition of the master thus attired awoke deep secret interest, and Bloom and his companions slowly and stolidly debated of the matter throughout that day.

Arscott was irritable and he reproved Bloom sharply in front of three younger men, before he left the quarry. Joshua spoke evilly of him when his back was turned and the others listened and nodded. None understood the granite-dealer and none perceived that he was consistent in his narrow philosophy of life.

For, though little of spontaneous kindness could be recorded to William Arscott's credit, yet he did deeds apparently generous, and gratuitous benefactions were known of him. While grasping and ungracious as a rule, yet the anomaly of sudden donations and unexpected gifts from time to time puzzled Belstone. These were scattered amid his more usual close-fisted relations with the community, like good plums in a bad pudding; and the real reason none had ever guessed. When, through act of man or woman, unexpected prosperity befell Arscott, he rewarded humanity, in some peddling sort, by doing a worthy act himself; and if ill overtook him, like Pharaoh, he was used to harden his heart and pay back a luckless scapegoat in kind. He did to his neighbour, not as he would be done by, but as he was done by; and this superficial justice not only satis-

fied a meanly educated conscience, but more than satisfied it and poured over into self-righteousness. If he suffered bad fortune, somebody smarted; if success overtook him, somebody was the richer by a shilling or two on his wages; or by a barrow of garden stuff; or by a hundred young cabbages. It was also well known that children had met Arscott returning from Okehampton or elsewhere, and received an occasional shilling or half-crown from him without visible reason. The secret principle of these excesses remained hidden, for Belstone failed to propound a rational theory concerning them.

As the tall clock in Harter kitchen struck eleven, William Arscott knocked at the door, and Mrs. Tapp appeared.

"Good morning, ma'am," he said. "Pretty weather, to be sure. The missis at home?"

"Step in the parlour, Mr. Arscott, an' I'll call her; an' 'tis pretty weather as you say."

William placed his hat and umbrella in a prominent position upon the harmonium and waited for Mrs. Redvers.

He looked about him and mumbled set phrases under his breath. Then he recollected his last visit to this room and re-peopled it with the members of the coroner's jury.

"I wonder if they built up a course or two of bricks around that well as we advised in the verdict?" he thought.

He was looking out of the window to ascertain, when Ann Redvers entered and he rose to greet her. She turned down her sleeves as she approached, and he noticed that her hands were white and that there was a sweet smell of flour about her.

"A very good morning, Mrs. Redvers. An' can

you spare a little of your busy time this morning?"

She shook hands and answered gravely,

"Yes, if you please."

He divined by the look in her dark eyes that she too recollected the last time he had visited Harter. For a moment Mr. Arscott hesitated whether to mention it; then he decided to do so, because it would show a gentler heart.

"You'm thinking, like me, of a year ago, Mrs. Redvers. A very good man, an' he earned his rest, as I hope we all shall. And I was wondering but yesterday if you'd like a rose-bush as I've got in my garden — no use to me. I'd plant it at his feet, an' I lay 'twould do very well there — nice free soil. Our graveyard do want brightening up to my eye."

She turned and stared at him, and her unbounded surprise rendered her ungracious.

"You never comed over here to say that — you of all men!"

"No — certainly not. An' if you don't like it I apologise. I meant well by it. I only suddenly thought to mention it this moment. I've come — well — I can't dash at the subject in a breath. Let me go slow."

By gradual stages Ann surmounted the shock of this proposition concerning the rose-bush. He saw her bosom rise and fall.

"Since when did you take to going slow?" she asked. "'Tis your way not to waste words, I thought."

"In business, yes. This ain't a common matter of business. It must come out bit by bit. First, how d'you find yourself? I do think an' hope you'm very well."

Still Mrs. Redvers was at a loss.

"Take your time then, since time's so cheap with you to-day. Yes, I'm well, I thank you. None ever ails in body to Harter."

"You are the wonderfulest woman I ever heard tell about, an' that's a fact."

"You haven't had much to do with women."

"No — an' yet I'm very kindly disposed towards them. I feel in my lonely life sometimes that there's a want that way."

"I dare say you do."

"And, mind you, 't isn't such a one-sided bargain. My house is my own, an' it only asks for a bit of new wall-paper here an' there, to be the best in Belstone after the rectory."

"A nice, comfortable house, I've heard."

"It might be made so for less than ten pounds. An' well sheltered too."

"Not a doubt of it."

There was a silence of some duration. They stood looking away from one another. Mrs. Redvers put a book straight on the table; then she asked a question.

"Be you coming nearer your subject, Arscott? 'Tis baking day with me."

"I might have known I'd go an' choose a wrong time," he said gloomily. "An' I'd planned an' cut out time an' worked double yesterday, so as to have a bit to spare."

"Yes, but I didn't. My word! Was ever the like? You, of all people, in the midst of the week, to come chattering as if 'twas Sunday afternoon. Say what you've got to say, there's a good man."

An idea occurred to him. He abruptly occupied a chair.

"I'll sit down, if you don't object," he said. "Then

I can talk easier. It won't take over long. Some of the most important things in life take the shortest time really."

She sat down by the table and rubbed a piece of dough from her hand.

"I want your advice," he said.

"An' welcome; but 'tis of little worth."

"What fashion of husband should I make, ma'am?"

"How can I answer that? I know nothing about you."

"Let me tell you something then. I'm a man of some stake in the world. A man you might say, without straining the truth, who was a good man, a plain dealer, sound as a nut, and God-fearing too. Fond of plain living and easily content."

"You've got your virtues — an' know 'em seemingly."

"You'll hear nought against me from any honest party."

"That's to your credit for certain."

"I've no secrets to keep from a wife neither. I've always gone straight ahead an' done my duty according to my lights."

"None could do better. An' no secrets? 'Tis a great thing."

"When I say 'no secrets,' I mean no dark ones. My conscience never pricks me day or night — that I can honestly say. There may be a thing or two I know an' the authorities don't; but that's neither here nor there. My conscience, as I say, be clear as a child's."

"You've a great deal to be thankful for — if it ban't asleep."

"It's awake enough, but perfectly steady. I put no strain upon it. Then I've got an income as might sur-

prise some of us, I dare say. I've built it up. No day but I've added a mite; an' I go on doing so."

Suddenly she understood his intentions and leant forward and surveyed him. She did not speak, but he shrank at her expression.

"Money is money, for all you look so hard at me," he said reproachfully.

"What in the name of goodness ——!" she began. Then she broke off. She could not refuse him before he had proposed.

"Don't be so fiery, ma'am," he said. "'Tis a free country, an' surely a man can come across the Moor to a wise woman without breaking any law. It's just this in a word. I want a wife."

"There's plenty would have you."

"Ban't certain even of that. Already I've — however, nothing venture. But no common, every-day woman will do for me. I consider at my age and in my position I've a right to look higher. I want a comely female — comely in reason; an' I want sense, an' patience, an' some knowledge of men folks — so she won't think she'm marrying an angel."

She nodded but saw no humour in his proposition.

"A sensible woman, an' not too young, an' not too soft-hearted," she answered. "That's what you want, I should reckon. You'm hard yourself an' you must look for ——"

"Not to her — not hard to that she, if I can find her. Given the right one, I could be as easy as any man — in trifles."

"I don't know such a woman."

"You do though," he said boldly. "An' none better: you know yourself."

She looked at him quietly.



"I feared you was on that errand," she said.

"An' your voice be like an enemy's almost. Don't say 'no' afore you've heard me. A very sober, solid man—a rock to lean upon as time goes on an' your boys get wives. An'—an' I'll tell you if you swear not to repeat it—though no other soul on God's earth knows—seven hundred pounds a year, an' growing! There, 'tis out!"

"Try an' do something useful with it. Very good money if you use it good. You ax me to marry you an' offer rising seven hundred a year. If you knowed half so much of me as I do of you——"

"I do," he said. "Often an' often I thought what a priceless boon you was to the late Redvers."

"You envied him?"

"In a perfectly respectful, proper way. I see your qualities because they be much the same as my own. You've got the same high mind and the same contempt for what don't matter. A 'hard' woman you was going to say. Well, ban't you hard, an' a blessed thing too?"

"Yes—hard an' cold both. There, I can't suffer no more of this. You mean well an' you'll make a very good husband, I dare say. But not for me. My light's out. I'm growing old."

"You'm 'mazing young for your years, believe me. Such a plain-living woman an' such an active one won't never grow old. We might put in for forty years of saving money. An' if that ban't a prospect to tempt a sensible creature, I never heard of one."

"Look round then. But don't be in a hurry. You'm not for all markets—to say it kindly. Ban't enough sap an' gentleness in you for a young, happy woman. Find somebody who's felt the rough edge of life, an' be saving by nature, an' never have had

the spending of money — one as have come near being hungry ——”

“The very thing I did!” he exclaimed inadvertently.

“You did?”

“Well, yes — since it’s out. I axed Barbara West-away, years and years ago; but she didn’t see it.”

“Ah, I remember. Well, third time’s lucky. Now you’d best to let me go back to my baking.”

“You won’t take a little time to consider of it?”

“No.”

“I suppose you’re right. Money ban’t everything in the eyes of women seemingly. I’m a poor tool where they be concerned. Plain, cross-grained, growing old ——”

“If you can see yourself, you can mend yourself. ’Tis a good thing to get an outside opinion sometimes.”

“Bah!” he answered with native bitterness. “That’s an old lie. What can others see when all’s said — even the sharpest of ’em, like you can yourself? Not the inside, but the outside; not the motives that make a man work an’ do, but only the deeds. None knows near so much about the truth of me as I do; an’, when a man’s turned fifty, he knows the worst about himself; an’ the best too.”

“Very like,” she said. “There’s left-handed comfort for some hearts in feeling the world don’t know the worst or best about them. Good-bye, Mr. Arscott. If ’tis in my power to do you a service ——”

“Good-bye, Widow Redvers; an’ sorry I am to the quick that you choose to remain so. An’ one thing: I’ll ax you to keep this talk quiet — every word — specially about figures. ’Tis only fair, because the truth was wrenched out of me by the excitement of offering marriage.”

"Rest quite easy. I've forgot what you said already, for that matter."

"But you'll remember it again. 'Tis sure to come back. Other people's business always sticks in the mind. Anyway, you'll promise?"

"Faithfully. I'll never repeat a word."

"Thank you; an' if at any time it looks to you in a different light—well, good-bye. There's Jesse coming up the path."

They went to the door and he added a final word that Ann's son might hear.

"Thank you for your opinion, Mrs. Redvers. It's worth money to anybody to have advice from you."

Then the stone-merchant bade Jesse 'good morning' and 'good day' in a breath and walked off down the garden with his head high.

Young Redvers watched him a moment and turned to his mother, but she had already gone back to the kitchen.

William Arscott, with his dreary thoughts, tramped homeward. The day was fiery hot and the air danced. Gradually a great annoyance mastered the man. His reverse, though hardly unexpected, yet disappointed him exceedingly. He resented the slight to his income more than the depreciation of himself. It shook him that any living woman could treat such a financial statement with indifference. Suddenly he uttered one of his rare oaths. It burst from his mouth and frightened two yellow-eyed sheep, that had crept under overhanging peat ledges of the moorland road and there lay and panted in scanty shadow.

"Be damned if I won't sack Joshua Bloom!" he said.

## CHAPTER VI

### SUNDAY AT HARTER

**B**Y the wish of Jesse, the master of Watchett Hill Farm, with his daughters, came after noon on a Sunday in September and drank tea at Harter.

The hostess and her sons assembled in the parlour to meet their company. Jesse and Michael wore black broadcloth; Mrs. Redvers was attired in weeds and a widow's cap, which she wore only on Sundays. Nathaniel Tapp and his wife had joined the company. A little fire burnt in the grate, because Mrs. Tapp had said that the room smelled damp.

Michael suddenly opened the harmonium, pressed the pedal and began to pick out a hymn tune that he had heard sung in church during the morning. The instrument groaned and wheezed as though awakening from a long sleep. It had not been touched since Anthony Redvers last played upon it. Jesse turned away, so as not to see his mother's face, but she showed no emotion. Such a matter of sentiment was too small to touch her. Mr. Tapp, who sometimes went to church and sometimes to chapel, was reading his favourite book beside the window. Now he put it down, took off his glasses and turned to the musician.

"I wish you could play what I heard this morning. One of Wesley's hymns it was, and went to the marrow almost as straight as Scripture. 'Tis a pity all Belstone didn't hear it—a sermon in itself."

He began gently to whistle.

"Can you call home the tune?" asked Michael;  
"I used to be able to knock out tunes easy enough;  
but I don't know the left hand to 'em."

"The words I shall larn by memory an' say along  
with my evening prayer," declared Tapp. He had no  
more self-consciousness than a Moslem in matters of  
religion.

"I've got a bit already," he continued, "an' though  
the music of song drives 'em home, yet I'll say out  
what I know."

He rose to his feet, put his hands behind him, like  
a schoolboy in class, and repeated two verses of John  
Wesley's hymn on David and Goliath.

"Who is this gigantic foe  
That proudly stalks along,  
Overlooks the crowd below  
In brazen armour strong?  
Loudly of his strength he boasts,  
On his sword and spear relies;  
Meets the God of Israel's hosts  
And all their force defies.

'Tallest of the earthborn race,  
They tremble at his power,  
Flee before the monster's face  
And own him conqueror—  
Who this mighty champion is,  
Nature answers from within;  
He is my own wickedness,  
My own besetting sin.'"

Mrs. Tapp was impressed with a side issue.

"Lord! the memory of the man," she said. "To  
get all that by heart between dinner an' tea!"

"The thing is to know your own besetting sin,"  
murmured Jesse. "For my part, I'm so wicked all  
round, I don't recognise it among the rest."

"In a general way you can't do better than ax a friend," answered Nathaniel Tapp. "Our neighbours always know. The biggest fool be sharp to see other people's weaknesses. But such things are better not spoken. They don't increase kindness an' charity. Anyway, you'll larn presently, for we're each called to fight Goliath of Gath soon or late; an' lucky is that man who have got the Gospel stone in his sling when the time comes."

"'Tis life or death then," said Jesse thoughtfully.

"So 'tis. We chops his head off, or he gathers us for the burning. An' I reckon you'll find that 'tis mostly a man's pet sin damns him — not general looseness all round. That's my view."

Michael began to play again; Mrs. Tapp nodded to herself and reflected upon her husband's sentiments; Jesse rose and went out of doors; and Nathaniel returned to his spectacles and his book. It was Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*.

Ten minutes later Mr. Westaway and his daughters arrived. He walked with his arm in Barbara's, and Salome followed. The elder woman wore stout russet, thick and unlovely; the younger was clad in thinner material of grey touched here and there with violet. She had made the dress herself and it fitted very ill, but no more killed her loveliness than an ugly vase can spoil a beautiful flower.

The time was too early for tea, so old Joseph asked to be allowed to sit out of doors awhile, smoke his pipe and grow cool. Michael and his brother carried some chairs to the south side of the house and all took their ease. Jesse and Salome went a little apart and talked together. He did not smoke, but Mr. Tapp, Mr. Westaway and Michael lighted pipes. Mrs. Redvers sat motionless with her hands folded in her

lap. Her eyes looked straight before her at the hills.

"I've wondered more'n once of late," said the head man of Harter, "whether tobacco's a right thing of a Sunday."

He stuffed a clay pipe as he spoke.

"Such a chap Nat's getting," laughed Michael. "Everything's wrong a'most. Us won't know what be right very soon."

"There's too many luxuries in the world without a doubt," declared Tapp. "Go an' look in the shop windows to Okehampton, an' you'll find that many men make a living by nought but selling useless things."

"If baccy's wrong on Sunday, it ban't right Monday," decided Mr. Westaway. "I'm not a Sabbath-breaker as I knows about, but the Sabbath was made for man, an' a lazy pipe's the pleasantest. Talk of baccy — only coming out of church this very day I was thinking what a 'mazing matter it was that all they dead an' gone heroes of past times could do the things they done without it. Now I'm a man as can't put hand to a stroke unless I'm smoking, or else chewing, or else snuffing. Dallybuttons! you might most say I *was* tobacco! Always at it — soaked in it. Yet great deeds was done afore 'twas found out."

"'Tis a puzzle to a thinking man, I'm sure," said Michael, and Mr. Tapp assented.

"It proves that the thing be a pure luxury an' that we are soft to use it," he said. "Same with potatoes. Not a word about 'em in the Book — strangely silent It be, if they was known. But I'm tolerably sure they was not. Just picture the life of they patriarchs of Scripture without 'taters an' tobacco!"

"'Twould surely be to feel like the house-cricket,

when he hopped out of the ark to find no little lew place left in the world," said Mr. Westaway.

They continued to talk ; then Joseph suddenly perceived that Mrs. Redvers was not joining in the conversation, and sought to draw her in.

"You wasn't to church this marnin', ma'am?"

"No, not this marnin'," she answered. But she offered no explanations.

"It would have pleased you to be there," he said. "A very peaceful, hopeful discourse from vicar."

Nathaniel snorted at the signal.

"We've got no use for peace an' hope in this world," he said. "Church folk be growing so mighty peaceful an' hopeful an' pleased with themselves an' their ways, that they'll very soon forget how to fear an' tremble. Be blessed if I'll give parson many more chances. There's no discipline in the man — all forgiveness an' forgetting."

"He may be very strict with himself in secret," suggested Mrs. Redvers. "I've known the easiest with their fellow-creatures to be very hard upon themselves."

"I hope it is so," answered Tapp. "All the same, the Devil's the Devil ; and that I will maintain against all comers. Our old man's losing sight of the awfulness of eternal punishment. Yet he must believe it. 'Tis at the very root of his business. Who don't believe it, for that matter?"

"I don't!" said Jesse, looking round from where he sat by Salome.

Nathaniel rose, stared about him and solemnly spat upon the earth.

"Then we've reached our climax at Harter," he said. "Mark me, souls! From this day us'll go down hill. There's no more hope if the master can



say afore company on the Seventh Day that he don't believe in hell."

He turned to Mrs. Redvers.

"I pity your grief, ma'am. Now you know that your family — small though it is — will be separated through all eternity!"

"Let's leave it at that an' come in to tea," said Jesse.

"We shall be ready in ten minutes; an' when I call, bring in the chairs, you boys," answered Mrs. Redvers. Then she and Sarah Tapp rose and went into the house to make ready.

For Ann her head man's solemnities were a weariness, to be endured when the fit was upon him. She knew his earnest spirit and high motives, but she perceived, as all such have perceived, that the significance of religion can only be grasped by a master-sinner. She had passed through perilous places that Nathaniel Tapp would never pass; she had fallen and suffered as he could neither fall nor suffer. She had walked for long days and writhed through nights in a worse hell than his thought pictured or his darkest apprehensions feared; and that hell, beginning on this side of her grave, stretched onward, through those dreary and eternal avenues of immortality in which she most steadfastly believed. She dragged the chain of life along, and such is the imperishable, sanguine instinct of man, that still sometimes hope fought faintly against faith, and in rare moments she felt a shadowed trust that God watched, and knew and recorded every pang, perhaps even to her credit. Patience was the present outcome of this inner torment, and daily she grew into a wider tolerance with humanity. As her dead husband's secret life had sweetened his relations with all men and served to render him generous and benevolent, so now, from

the standpoint of her past, she ceased to judge man or woman any more; she treated the adult and the old with a gentleness before reserved for children alone.

Tea was taken under a fire of rather personal observations from Mr. Tapp, who regretted to notice a restraint of speech concerning Jesse's impiety. The subject awakened no general horror. Even Mrs. Tapp inclined towards charity and her husband determined sharply to question her opinions when night brought privacy. Despite evidences of impatience from Michael and Jesse, Nathaniel persisted in keeping the conversation to morals. Indeed, he had no other subject.

"'Tis a very grand thing to sweep the Gospel broom around the dark corners of the soul," he said, looking over a steaming saucer of tea at the company. "Us must clear the cobwebs from the corners, else they'll soon choke up all. There be them as would shake at the thought of not having a Spring cleaning; yet they never think about a Soul-cleaning from one year's end to another."

"What a sermon in a word!" said Mrs. Tapp.

"Can't say I much believe in that scouring an' tearing," declared Joseph. "'Tis the regular everyday steadiness I set store by. We must never lose our tempers; we must keep our dignity an' remember the rights of man; we must remember too that us in high places, with land and flocks and herds, must never grow puffed up afore our poorer neighbours. Afore all we must do good for evil. These be things so easily done as drawing on your shirt of a morning, if you once get in the way of doing 'em."

"I never could do good for evil; an' I won't pretend to it," said Salome.

"Quite true," admitted the flock-master. "More could your dear mother. It fought against her sense

of justice. She said 'twas not done by the Law of the Land — which of course be true. Evil for evil's the law of man. Her sense of justice comed between your dear mother and a good deal of the happiness of life. But me an' Barbara was different. She have always returned good for evil to my knowledge."

"An' always shall," declared Barbara rather reluctantly. "No credit to me at all," she continued, "for I don't specially like it. But it comes easier. 'Tis only my poor spirit — like a dog as can't bear malice for twenty-four hours."

"Give it up," said Jesse defiantly. "You'll not be thought the better of. People will only laugh at you."

They ate and drank, then Ann's elder son rose from the table and Salome did the same.

"We're going to see the litter of puppies," explained Jesse, "an' we shan't come back, mother. I'll take Salome home-along presently."

"Good-bye, Mrs. Redvers," said the girl. "I'll run over next week with a brave basket of bilberries for 'e. They'm fine this year an' I like the picking of 'em."

She looked into the elder woman's eyes, then suddenly lifted her face up and kissed Ann.

"Good-bye, my dear," answered the other, surprised at an act so unexpected. "Good-bye, an' the berries will be welcome."

Then the young couple went out together; but the puppies were not visited. They walked along over the fields and moved slowly where the little Blackavon tumbles down to meet Oke at Culliver's Steps.

"You'm miserable to-day," she said suddenly. "I could see how that old man's talk fretted you."

"It did. Words flow out of him like rain out of

a shoot. An' everything he says be so terrible narrow an' proper that he makes me feel mad sometimes. What is religion? I don't know."

"To try an' lessen the sorrow of the world, perhaps?"

"No — that's a different thing. I should call that sense. But to me right an' wrong be a mad puzzle an' not a stroke of comfort from praying about it, nor reading the Bible. But I'm not fretted when alone with you. You did a thing as brought strange happiness to me a minute ago; though just why I couldn't tell you."

"What was that then?"

"You kissed my mother."

Salome kept silent for some moments.

"I don't know what it was brought me to do it," she said presently. "Something in her beautiful sad face — like a stone image's face almost. I seemed to see all she'd suffered looking out of her eyes, so wisht an' deep. She didn't know 'twas peeping out, but I seed it. If you could dip in my heart, Jesse, you'd find that I know more of what your mother's lost than any other human creature knows."

"I do believe it," he said. "You've got such a way with you. You understand people; and you understood him an' knowed the high stamp of man he was."

"I loved him — like everybody."

"More — more. I've heard you say truer things about my father than any other man or woman ever said. Oh, if I was more like him — perhaps then ——"

"What, Jesse?"

A sudden twist of thought changed the aspiration of the moment.

"If I could tell mother you'd marry me ——!"

They walked along the crest of fresh-ploughed fallow, and the black earth glimmered with myriads of gossamers. Down the side of this field a sledged cart had passed, and the streak of the metal shoe shone there like a ribbon of silver touched to fire by the setting sun. Upon a stump old bluebottles sat in the light, mourned the summer past and buzzed feebly. The gossamers glittered in a lovely play over the dark earth, and here, like falling rain, emitted flashes of prismatic colour, for they were strung with countless little dewdrops.

Meantime, in an atmosphere of toast and tea, Mr. Tapp still dogmatised and his wife and Joe Westaway applauded and urged him on. Twice Mrs. Redvers attempted without success to change the conversation; then, guessing that no other theme than their own affairs would be more interesting to the Westaways, she bluntly expressed a hope that the approaching ewe-market held great promise for the flock-master.

"Well," he answered, gazing at Barbara, "I'm so often wrong afore the event that I'll not speak too positive; but if prices run respectable there ought to be enough for winter."

"If it wasn't for Mr. Arscott," added his daughter frankly. "So civil as he is — it do make me very uncomfortable to think about him."

"I trust he's not taking that writing in an unfriendly spirit," murmured Joseph.

"I'm sure he oughtn't," declared Michael Redvers, "for the man's got fortune on his side, an' such a highly prosperous chap should be gentle with them as ban't so full of luck as himself. Everything goes right with him."

"It rains corn an' wine an' oil on him, so I hope he'll see his way to the virtue of patience," mused old Westaway. "He may be very sure he won't lose a farthing by me."

"Trust him!" said Barbara.

"Fair or foul, there's the life policy," continued her father. "That's paid up on the nail, an' always will be while I draw breath."

"Though how we do it puzzles me," continued Barbara. "The wear an' tear be frightful as the time comes close."

"In my high position 'tis very trying sometimes," declared old Joseph. "Nobody seems to see how very sad it is for an important man to be pressed for cash. Yet the advice I get here an' there would sink a ship. Even old Ned Pearn — old Pearn, mind you! — must stop in the road to tell me what he'd do! An' me a man who have signed a cheque for fifty-two pound an' made no stir about it."

He relapsed into most unwonted gloom, from which Mrs. Redvers roused him.

"I dare say you'll take a little drop of spirits an' water, Mr. Westaway, afore you think of starting?"

He assented instantly, helped himself to a stiff tot, and soon grew hopeful and genial again.

"Well, well, the thing is to look around an' see the ways of the world," he said. "An' for my part, when I say, 'Show me a man with higher trust in God than Joe Westaway, or better knowledge of sheep, or two such darters as he have got,' I feel there isn't such a man."

"An' when all's said, there's Eternity," added Mr. Tapp in a cheering voice.

"Ess, indeed. With the Missis waiting there; but no giving in marriage no more, so as one may meet

her again without a chance of being misunderstood," declared Mr. Westaway. "What you say is true, Nat: 'tis very much better to live than not; for, when all's said, life be no more than the sour rind to a sweet kernel. Not so sour, neither. There's a mighty lot in it I'll be very sorry to leave. The run for the prize be nearly as good as the prize itself, I used to think, when I was a nimble-footed boy. An' you, ma'am; I lay you ponder of the future often enough?"

"Often enough," she said.

"Won't you sup a drop along o' me?"

"No, thank you. We are water-drinkers here — save Nathaniel."

"An' wise — very wise. So be my girls, of course. Keep to plain water so long as you can; then you'll find spirits a tower of strength against the seventies — same as I do."

Presently the old man and Barbara took their leave. Mrs. Redvers and Michael walked with them to the outer gate, and the flock-master, dropping back, spoke a word to Ann.

"Mark me, Mrs. Redvers, there's something up between your eldest an' my Sally! I've a sharp eye yet. An' my girl's good as gold an' thrifty as the Bible ant, I can assure 'e. I do hope you think well of her?"

"A very quiet, peaceful girl. I know little of her."

"An' nothing but good, I'm sure?"

"No, indeed," she answered kindly. "She's a beautiful maiden. Them lovely eyes might soften a stone."

"An' Jesse's turned that way. At least, so it looks. But perhaps I'm wrong."

"No; you'm right. 'Tis only natural."

"You wouldn't have nought against it?"

She reflected.

"'Tis a thing I've had in my thoughts. No—I don't see nothing against it—if Jesse don't."

"To be frank, I can't do all for her you might expect. Still, there's half the life policy after I'm gone."

"Don't name that, father," she answered gently. "If they understood each other and their hearts be one in it—Jesse would be a happier man and a holier man belike with a good wife."

"Then I'll do what a parent may to further 'em," he said.

"No, no. Leave it all to them. They'll bring us the news fast enough if they agree."

And a mile away, where Blackavon made little waterfalls under an old larch and leapt through autumn flowers to the valley, young Jesse Redvers had again asked Salome to marry him, and again heard her decline to do so.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE TALKING MEN

**JESSE REDVERS**, out of his weakness, cried in the dark for strength, for light, and for a rule of conduct. They did not appear; but now, four days after his last meeting with Salome, there came an intellectual earthquake into his existence — a cataclysm that shattered old ideas and slew familiar opinions. Had he listened to a devout Christian, his course might have been modified thereby; had some spiritist arrested his attention, different results had possibly been chronicled; but it happened that for the space of an hour he found himself within the intellectual atmosphere of rationalism — an atmosphere to which his stifled intelligence already unconsciously turned for breath.

He drove from Belstone to Chagford in a little omnibus that plied between those villages during summer-time; and beside him sat two men. They carried rods and creels, and from conversation on sport, drifted into higher topics.

One was a big, genial, red-bearded fisher, with laughing eyes and a zest of life that infected the observer. He had helped to get three heavy wicker baskets of cackling geese on to the top of the vehicle, and an admiring circle of rustics had roared with laughter at his jokes. The younger fisherman appeared of Jesse's age and resembled him. His face was somewhat thin and mournful. Occasionally the natural gloom lifted

from his countenance and timid animation awoke upon it. Mentally and physically this youth revealed a target for trouble. But the older man looked with undaunted eyes at life, as at a stern comrade he knew and trusted. The talk turned to morals, and Jesse listened eagerly. There was, however, a gap between his ideas and the things he now heard. The fishermen began at a point that he had not reached; and now for the first time in his life he heard some simple axioms of free thought, set out, happily for him, in a manner modest, courteous and deferential.

A wind tempestuous and keen blew into Jesse's mind; but whether the blast would presently invigorate or crush, would hearten or depress, would knit together or break in sunder, depended upon the texture of his own intellect.

"I suppose it's summed up in Shakespeare's word, 'To thine own self be true'?" asked the younger man; and the other shook his head.

"Rather not. That's Shakespeare's character; not the Bard. All writers of fiction are criticised so. The things their puppets say are brought in judgment against them—a brutal crime to commit against any conscientious artist. Old Polonius made that remark. To your own self you *must* be true. It's a law as eternal as gravitation or evolution. But a man can be true as steel to himself and false to the world. Napoleon was true to himself; Nero was true to himself; at the same time, they were false to their kind and false to the noblest instincts that nature has yet lighted in the heart of man."

His friend admitted the argument.

"We know a knave who paints glorious pictures, for that matter. I suppose he's true to himself, though false apparently to every other man and woman."

"Heredity seems rather in the cold just now," continued the elder. "It is the swing of the pendulum. We overdid the theory; now we are overlooking it. Yet how one proves it in oneself! My father died when I was a little shaver, and I never knew him. Now I am forty-five, and every day I know more about my father, because I know more about myself. I can see his instincts, his weaknesses, his virtues. I also understand my mother better as I increase in years; and my sisters and brothers. I see each true to the implanted instincts; I mark the roads diverge and note where this or that parental quality gained ascendancy, or where bygone strains reasserted themselves. That is not to ignore the personal idiosyncrasy."

"And the rule of conduct that a man follows will depend upon that personal idiosyncrasy, if the bent happens to be too strong for education?"

"The bent will not be got rid of by education, if there is a bent," answered the red man. "Each must be true to himself; and his ideals, whatever they may be, depend upon his own genius or disposition. Now to me there are two very simple rules of life—one for morals and one for physics; and if we kept them, the world would be a different place. The first is the Golden Rule of all great teachers: 'Do as you would be done by.' And the other I call the Iron Rule. My mother earth has taught it to me: 'Break Nature's laws and she will break you.' Who doesn't know that in his own bones?"

The big fisherman laughed and patted a rheumatic knee.

"Faith demands more from us," said the younger.

"Reason has lifted religion on to a higher plane."

"But think of that awful mind-struggle a man sets himself if he refuses to accept what he can't thrash

out and explain. I'm much too busy to do it, for one."

"So are most men," admitted the other. "It's a pity. I thought I was too busy once. But if you want to claim your birthright in the chain of mental evolution, you must look to your own link in that chain and not be too busy to keep it shining and free of rust. Cleave to something and know why you do it. Hold to faith if you honestly can do so; put reason first if you honestly must. But remember to distrust like a half-cured plague the man who tells you that faith and reason can run in double harness. That's the grand lie this century is going to kill for ever. Faith and morals can be separated and will be; reason and morals cannot. Physics and metaphysics must give and take; and physics, the strong, is always merciful to metaphysics, the weak. But between faith and reason you'll find a different condition of affairs. Reason does not forget faith's attentions in the past. Reason remembers the stake and the saw, Hypatia and Bruno. Reason knows what faith would do to-morrow if the old power was restored to her. Now therefore when faith, for the sake of her own existence, desires to make friends, reason is gentle and courteous, but she is firm."

The big man laughed, though his companion was not amused.

"I suppose the criterion of a faith is its vitality?" he said. "Christianity was certainly alive in the time of the Crusades. Men fought for an ideal then. But you wouldn't call the United Kingdom, for instance, really Christian except in name."

The big man laughed again.

"Our rulers know that well enough," he answered. "If Parliament put the nation's Christianity before its

welfare for one session, the Ministry would fall. A Christian tradition has become impossible of support if we are to hold our place amid Christian nations. But ethical progress and real human prosperity are both matters of evolution; they depend upon no creed. The creeds, like flowers, do their work and set their seed and pass away. Principles are safe with the race of men. Spencer points out that there has never been war between man's intellectual faculties and his moral obligations. He admits no such radical vice in the nature of things. But pioneers will always be distrusted, if not actually hated. A Socrates is destroyed for impiety; a Christ is crucified for blaspheming God. Those who slew them were very worthy, well-meaning men. The mountain of Truth is strewn with martyrs' bones at every step, and every ideal has its sacrifices."

"You are a rationalist, I know."

"That's the latest name for it. I found that reason made the world sweeter, saner, wiser, than dogmatic faith; that men of science in their ceaseless struggle to come nearer Truth were producing higher practical results than the priests of any creed. Each cause has a glorious roll-call. But a saint is a saint because he has got to be; the martyrs of reason and of faith have died for their beliefs, because they were built of the inspired clay that joys to suffer for something greater than itself. Each was true to himself, each was true to his ideal of truth."

"People hate this subject."

"They do. It is unfortunate—for them. We write 'no admittance to reason' in one place only: over our church doors. It is to be regretted, because discussion is the air by which Truth breathes. Forbid it, she perishes. I should instantly begin to doubt

whether the sun were the source of light, if I were not allowed to discuss the matter."

The bearded man stopped a moment and then he continued.

"But what a bad time they've had—the seekers after truth—during faith's long reign! Hated and untrusted, the great sons of liberty tramped forward through the night and passed on the Key of Wisdom from their dying hands. It was never lost; the spirit of truth watched over her own; and names for ever forgotten of man are not forgotten of her."

A long silence followed, and the big fisherman brought out his fly box.

"Then you are left with God?" said the younger suddenly, and Jesse's heart stood still.

"I am left with a further choice between Will or Force—between Will, for a God-ruled Universe or Force, for a state of things independent of any creative impulse. In the last breach reason brings you to that. And mighty minds have decided both ways. We must be true to ourselves."

"What lies behind this Force? What started it?" asked the younger.

"The old, stupid question that's always supposed to knock the stuffing out of us. You assume no beginning for your God, but expect me to explain the beginning of my Force. You can believe in a condition of things without an end, but cannot grasp the idea of a condition that had no beginning. Well, to me, both ideas are unthinkable—end or beginning. Ages ago the Hindoos decided that they were both dreams. It is like this, my dear fellow; once rule out a Mind behind the ways of nature, and they become endurable, as founded on law. Given a Will, on the other hand—a responsible, watchful, all-powerful

Being at the helm and heart of things, then life as displayed upon this planet ought to make us all run mad with terror at His name. If our little minds were large enough to grasp the horror of conscious existence, we should go mad on the God hypothesis. That's why I have rejected Deity, and in so doing rolled a mighty incubus off my life."

"You believe in nothing—trust in nothing?"

"I both believe and trust. I believe that only matter is eternal, but no form of it. I believe of mankind a word uttered by the silver trumpet of Swinburne at the dawn of that sunrise he climbed aloft to see:

" ' Save his own soul's light overhead  
None leads him, and none ever led.' "

And I believe that man's soul came out of Nature by the inevitable and solemn march of evolution, as surely as the song of the bird and the love of the mother. Nor is trust lacking to me; I trust in the unborn, not the dead."

"The 'Alma Venus' of Lucretius? But that's not enough for the millions of men."

"Let them be true to themselves. Let them lift and purify the conception of their Deity. This world is still tolerably full of evil; and if your God is suffering evil that good may come, then why does conscience forbid us to do the like? You say conscience is the voice of God. Grant it for a moment. But has the Law-giver a right to break his own laws? Under no conceivable system of ethics. There have lived men on this earth—Christ among the number—who, had they possessed half the power you credit to your God, would have administered the affairs of the world in a manner infinitely more just, infinitely more sane, infinitely more thoughtful for the generations to come.

Every generation makes its own Gods in its own image, and the evolution of the God idea is proved. It will serve its turn and, like the scaffold when the house is complete, vanish."

Young Redvers stared solemnly. Here then was an atheist in the flesh. To him the appellation signified a human outlaw—a malevolent wretch beyond the pale of man's patience or sympathy—a moral Judas who had betrayed all sanctified trust and denied the foundations of the round world. How could a man make jokes about geese and believe these things?

Then followed the matter vital to Jesse's future thought.

"You do for the Almighty what my Church is doing for the great Enemy: get rid of him," said the other. He showed emotion and sorrow.

"I find the Divine idea not essential to conduct. As to the great Enemy, or evil principle, — this imaginary poisonous leaven, mixed into the lump of humanity, — if the Church banishes the dogma of the Fall to regions of myth, it must logically lose the dogma of original sin also. The Fall was the invention of a primal Homer to explain man's tendency towards evil. But surely it is allowed now, even by unscientific people, that men are born babies, not damned sinners."

"I suppose the ancients had no doctrine of sin in the Christian sense," said the younger.

"Paganism did not recognise any such thing," answered his friend. "Guilt they appreciated in all its shapes; vice they knew and satirised. Guilt and vice belong to the individual, or family, or nation; but sin, as your Christian understands it, is a disease or taint with which every member of the human race is born, and from the consequence of which none can escape except by a miracle on the part of an all-power-



ful God who suffered them so to be born. That to me is a loathsome idea. I reject it with scorn and shame as a disgrace to man's reason and an insult to his intellect."

"Guilt may have no basis in natural wickedness."

"Of course not. *Œdipus* was guilty of atrocious crimes, but he did not sin. He went, a very noble spirit, to answer that awful voice in the tree-shadows of *Colonus*."

"Your old parrot cry: 'a man must do what he must.'"

"He must be true to himself," answered the elder. "He cannot act outside his character. But the results of education as exhibited in conscience must be remembered. Life depends on character, and education, though it can fortify or modify character, cannot create it. Remember, the worst crimes are not the work of the so-called criminal class. Many men have a tremendous bent to good; and goodness can be taught, like a language or a musical instrument. Some will leap to goodness by virtue of their natural genius; some will excel at it and pass the teacher; some will fail utterly. Do you remember the two things that filled Kant with awe? They were the starry heavens and the sense of moral responsibility in man. Upon this last sense those who think as I do, hopefully stake the future of mankind. It is a result of evolution pure and simple. The higher the race, the more moral responsibility it recognises."

"That is conscience, and I deny conscience to be a matter of evolution," said the younger firmly.

"My dear fellow, nothing is absolute—least of all conscience," answered the other. "Morals are relative. Its code advances with a nation's progress. What was wrong is not always wrong. What is right

to-day may be wrong to-morrow. To-day certain sects of Moslems think it a greater crime to smoke a cigar than to commit a murder. I shall avoid that sect. Our own highest society holds a seduction nothing as compared with a *mésalliance*. Etiquette is still above ethics; yet the tribal conscience evolves steadily. My conscience made me go on my knees night and morning for thirty years. When I first gave up praying, my conscience felt sad, until I educated it to the higher position that my reason commanded."

"Some would say that your reason had not lifted it, but murdered it."

The big man nodded.

"Many would honestly believe so. They would be true to themselves in that belief."

"True to themselves—true to themselves—it's like a death-bell tolling," said the younger bitterly—"tolling the knell of Free Will."

The subject dropped. The little vehicle jolted on. A honey bee buzzed in at the window and fell upon the straw by Jesse's feet. He was going to kill it; but the fisher with the red beard stopped him.

"Hold on, young chap! I'll swear that fellow has done more good to-day than any of us! Don't shorten his usefulness."

The bee was saved and sent through the window; the fishermen began to talk of trout flies. Not until both had alighted and gone their way did Redvers leave the vehicle. He forgot his errand; he forgot everything but this new theory of the mysteries of life. He was eager to examine it, to weld it, perhaps even to wield it and learn if herein lay a weapon strong enough to withstand his enemies and cut the knot of his unrest. His instinct called him to climb up on high ground, and he turned his face to the Moor.

The men had also gone that way, and he saw their rods flash far off beside the waters of Teign. Then he passed westerly by a valley and anon climbed Steeper-ton's lofty mitre above the marshes of Taw. There he addressed himself to his task, sat him down and began to think as he had never thought until that hour. In his mind new ideas marshalled themselves and old opinions perished at the onset of battle; under his eyes was spread an earthly scene of magnificent dimensions and majestic beauty.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE WORLD FROM STEEPERTON

**C**HANGEFUL weather held the moment, and the south gradually darkened, but the sky still continued bright, while great cloud movements developed slowly. Eastward there hung a haze of transparent blue, and the sunshine was softened and robbed of its actual splendour by remoteness. Upon highest Dartmoor darkness already sat, and great quiet brooded round Jesse, save for the rushes at his feet that sighed of rain. Before him Cosdon billowed like a seventh wave, and the ling light leapt for miles along its enormous bosom. Between earth and sun, in the loftiest chambers of the air, silver cirrus shone like a net of pearl, and poured down pure light from a million separate cloudlets that spread upon the blue. Anon their radiance waned, and they massed slowly into sobriety before the darkening of the south. Floods of sunshine still fell over the valleys, but where Yes Tor and his twin towered against the west their heather's royal purple partook of gloom, soaked up the gathering darkness like a sponge, and spilt it upon the lesser hills and coombs beneath. Water crawled leaden there until sunshine broke through and touched it to gold. The light roamed at longer intervals, then went out upon those despondent slopes, and the immanent secret of the hour rose with sad sense upon Jesse's soul. For he knew that when the sun hid his face

the spirits of Autumn and of death would steal abroad. They were already present beside him; they slew swiftly; and he beheld the latter end of many beautiful things.

"The sun is the only God!" he cried out.

Carrion crows croaked overhead, where they flew together. He wondered how specks so small could pour down such volume of discordant sound. Far below certain spots gleamed dazzling white, and he knew that they were the bones of beasts. The sun that found them and lighted them like a lamp, also indicated many living animals. The hides of the kine were red, black and dun; and they galloped with their calves and bellowed of the rain.

So silent Jesse sat that heath larks fluttered to his feet. His eyes removed from their small bodies narrowed again to focus distance, then fell on Taw river where she glittered, an infant stream, from her cradle in Cranmere. And still the sun reigned over the north, burst the cloud-meshes, and scattered glory into the amphitheatre of a mighty vale, where it spread, all decked for the pomp of the time, between Cosdon and the jagged Belstones. Here Nature, working in loneliness upon the loom of morass and winding river, water-worn gravel reaches, heather ridges, vast banks of furze and slopes of dying fern, had fashioned a triumph for the victory of Autumn. Blended, inwrought and inwoven; leavened with the light that burns on the brink of rain; like a jade cup brimming with jewels; rich in all imaginable harmonies of primary colour; stately in primitive strength of huge and simple forms, there spread forth the marshes of Taw. Here the mists generate, and the great cloud shadows sail; here is a trysting-place for rainbows and the rain; and here lie regions wide enough to display the whole

pageant of the seasons, to exhibit the ephemeral procession of all the hours. From their rosy-footed dawn dance in Spring, you shall follow them to their drowsy shudderings under red Autumn sunsets; from their fainting and their death among the withered flowers to the shroud of snow that descends out of December upon their forgotten graves.

This wide vision of flashing waters, shining air and departing life, opened upon the north by an embouchure where Taw passed out of Dartmoor for ever and fell into the vales. Here, between the shoulders of the land, Exmoor hung like a grey gauze that seemed no part of the world. Clouds and darkness and fleeting interspaces of light mingled over the intermediate expanse and wrapped earth's buxom bosom from the Channel to the Severn Sea. That enormous semicircle was darkened with forests, softened by great lonely moors and waste places, brightened magically where the sun found yellow harvests and touched each acre of ripening grain into a topaz. Wheat and barley shone out from the dimmer tessellation of browns and ambers and many greens; naked red earth and remote waters filled up the patchwork; blue smoke drifted over it and dimmed detail; villages glimmered in the heart of it; church towers arose above them; and sometimes steam trailed across and faded as it trailed.

Jesse Redvers, resting from the struggle of his mind, beheld this remote vision and likened it to the high priest's breastplate of Judgment, concerning which he had recently read. These planes of innumerable fields wrought out by human hands answered to the sapphire and agate, the beryl and the jasper. Their glory shone like a jewel hung with living rainbows on the round bosom of the Mother. Next he remembered Urim and Thummim, worn by Aaron upon his heart

before the Lord; and he mused concerning that mystery, and humbly longed that for him also such direct appeal to the Everlasting was possible. Then into the springtide and highest surges of thought he fell, for that day he had heard how there might be no Everlasting. He pressed his hands upon his temples, and strove to begin at the beginning.

One man had said that we ought to be true to ourselves, and the other had answered that we must be and could not help it. A great simplification of life appeared to follow this necessity; but presently he found the clearness more apparent than real. At first everything slipped into its place with ease, like the fragments of a puzzle when the key is furnished. His father had been faithless to his mother because he was himself; she had struck that terrible blow because she was herself. Were there any creatures that broke this rule? He could think of none. Every man and woman that he knew did nothing outside their characters—at least in the sight of the world. His parents had wrought with the energies implanted in them and the clash of their natures had left an inevitable tragedy woven into the web of things. He did not know how chance plays with the inherent qualities, how accident may eclipse the best or worst, how opportunity often reveals a hero or hides a knave. He, like his mother herself, was ignorant that a gust of wind on a window had made her a murderess.

Every existence proceeded by this cosmic law and did and suffered what was proper to it. The granite continued hard until time completed its circle, severed its particles and brought all back into the dust again; the heather played out its yearly wonder beneath his eyes; the furze never forgot to be sharp of thorn and sweet of scent. Bird and beast, earth and river, cloud

and wind, the seasons and the stars — all were faithful and showed no shadow of change. The sun in heaven was obedient, the insect that settled on his hand likewise obeyed. No single thing, since matter first assumed that fleeting and particular shape, had received any faculty to depart from its proper qualities and appointed task. The first commandment ordained that all creatures should be true to themselves. And so perceiving, Jesse inquired of himself concerning himself, as a conscious existence faced with the problem of his father's death by his mother's hand. That his mother had been true to herself softened his heart before the thought of her crime; that his father had been true to himself hardened the son's spirit when he reflected upon that death.

To ask what he should do next seemed now a fruitless question: it was clear that he would do what he must. Whether that was really the right course mattered little, since it could be the only course. If it was the wrong course, then let the laws of life answer for it. He must follow the road of organic things and play his part with the rest. For a moment he supposed that love of his father might lift him from this destiny and point to free will; but he perceived the idea was vain, since his attitude towards love, hate, justice and mercy, and his capabilities in the various fields of moral action were decided once and for all by his own compounded nature. Such emotions might serve to influence, but they could not change. Like the sunshine on a budding flower, they might help to develop the determined character and hue; but as no sun-ray could make a white rose red, so no thunderstorm of chance or of accident, no experience, blessed or baneful, possessed power to prevent the bud of his youth from expanding into the predestined blossom of



his manhood. Life might hasten or retard, promote or dwarf development, but the nature of the flower was fixed and the quality of the fruit inevitable.

He resented this conclusion with the energy of a wild, trapped creature beating against steel bars. Why should he not emerge from this stupefaction of thought and do a definite deed? He put instances to himself. He imagined opposite courses of action and asked what barred one road and impelled along the other. Always something of a mental paralytic, these conclusions that he had heard might have been expected much to soothe him. They did the reverse, however, and fretted his spirit to madness.

Rain began to fall gently, but young Redvers did not heed it. He tossed on a wild sea of thought, now hoping, now mistrusting, now clutching at an idea, now losing it. He feared much. He felt that he was travelling too fast and too far. His brain grew gradually weary. His home-taught conscience, that had often longed to break away from accepted things, found itself suddenly lost; and it grew frightened. He remembered that the same experience had happened to the trout-fisher. Ceaselessly young Jesse yearned for some voice more than natural to guide and direct. Until now he had always prayed. Must he pray no more? Despite these miseries he felt at the bottom of his heart a thankfulness that free will was a myth. The fact to his infirm mind spoke liberty. He had yet to learn that all liberty — save that of thought — was likewise a myth and a condition impossible.

The rain fell more heavily, but he continued unconscious of it. He sat upon a great, weathered boulder where matted moss, thick and pale grey of colour, stuck in pads and patches, like mangy fur on some huge beast. Afterwards both moss and stone came to life

in mad dreams and the calentures of fever. For the moment he regarded them not at all, but rested his back on the granite and let the gathering rain-clouds wrap his body, even as the mass of undigested thought weighed leaden upon his mind. Darkness now flew up out of the South on soaking wings. The tors retreated one by one within their familiar hoods and habiliments of cloud; sheet upon sheet of rain swept down into the marshes and each grey shadow darkened over the last, until the magic of that far-flung and glittering concavity was yielded up and only a void of blind-eyed water and grim, monotonous, monochromatic slough spread desolately there. Then that also vanished and sank drowned out of his eyes. The world was lost to him save for the immediate breast of Steeperton and the stone and livid moss whereon he sat.

He struck the ground irritably with his stick, because he could not remember some of the things the man had spoken. He came to the Golden Rule and the Rule of Iron. He fought to fit them into his own life and to pursue a consistent path henceforward. A revulsion of feeling got sudden grip of him and he leapt up and uttered a great cry.

"There's no puzzle — there's no reason for all this fighting an' sweat o' brain! I will go on with my life like I did afore to-day. I'll forget every word. 'Tis only one man's view. Perhaps he was mad. He laughed very loud. Anyway — if it will out — it will out. If 'tis my part to tell it — tell it I shall. I must do what I must. I'll take that from the man, but no more. I'll remember that an' forget the rest."

This conclusion did not hearten him, but shamed him back into further thinking. For a moment he felt the chill of the rain and turned up the collar of his coat. Then he sat down once more and fell upon

the distinction between sin and guilt that he had heard. From this he fought to suck some consolation. Behind Christianity there was a time when none entertained the idea of sin. The trout-fisher affirmed that many still rejected it with shame. If, then, Jesse's mother was merely guilty, but not a sinner, her state might be the more gracious. The young man lacked a machinery of words to develop this subject. He struggled unavailingly to proceed with it; but since reasoned thought without words is impossible, he failed. This, however, seemed clear to him. Without free will, sin—in the Christian sense—could not exist, just as surely as that, given victorious evil, the conceit of an all-powerful, all-loving Father was futile. By the simple expedient of withholding rain in India, God had recently starved hundreds of thousands of men and women and little children. Jesse suddenly remembered this.

"That is enough for me," he said. "I'll cry out for Force same as that man did. No more God after to-day."

He returned to his mother. He proved to himself that she had broken the law of man because she was bound to obey the law of her own being. He determined to explain this to Ann Redvers that she might be comforted!

Next he thought upon his brother and perceived something of the difference between Michael and himself. It seemed that Michael's love for his mother was stronger than reason; while Jesse found natural affection no more than a shadow when confronted with abstract questions of justice and of right. He much envied Michael's stout and impregnable position. To cling thus to a living and sad mother was perhaps after all not unreasonable, but the highest expression

of reason built on pure love. It savoured sweeter than his own position. He felt a sudden mental sickness as the result of thus gorging so deeply on the subtle ethics of justice to his dead father. Satiety produced an actual physical condition of discomfort. Within his skull he felt for the first time Nature's familiar warning to the brain-worker that he must rest awhile.

It was now no longer a question of what he should do for his father's memory, but what he must do to justify his own existence. The answer to that question appeared tolerably clear. Anthony Redvers had loved his wife with all the strength and vigour of his nature. What would he have directed? There was some hope there. To be a good son looked a simple thing. And yet how far from simple in his case. Could it be good to live a lie for ever? Could it be good for his mother, who was turning grey under this long-drawn agony? Could it be good for Michael thus to persevere until the very fabric of his life was soaked and dyed with falsehood?

He moved suddenly and a spasm of intolerable cold set his teeth chattering. It was rebellion of a body stout and strong enough, yet not bred or nurtured to stand this strain. He shook his shoulders and found himself wet to the skin. Familiar physical forces were busy with him: he had broken the Iron Law.

Jesse set off running down the hill, and presently crossed the river beneath. He knew his way and pursued it by instinct. The rain flying horizontally under a tremendous wind stung his cheek with liquid dust, like a shower of prickles, and set the skin tinkling. His exertion warmed his blood and made him feel happier despite himself. Within an hour he had reached home; and that night, for the first time in his life, he tasted bodily pain.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE IVORY GATE

**D**ESPITE a sleepless night and much unfamiliar misery, Jesse Redvers rose at earliest dawn and rode out upon his accustomed duties. But immediately after he returned home, he amazed the household by declaring himself unwell. He refused breakfast, went back to his bed and attempted in vain to sleep. A headache, that made him blind and sick, and a dull mass of minor pain deep in his chest were the symptoms under which he suffered. Gradually he grew worse, and the next day his mother sent Nathaniel Tapp into Belstone for Doctor Blight. The medical man rode over towards evening, protested at not being sent for sooner, and took a serious view of the case. He directed treatment, sent remedies and returned early on the following morning. Then he proclaimed that the patient suffered from pneumonia and was dangerously ill.

Into the great shadow descended Jesse and hung between life and death while his kindred watched him and fought night and day to keep him alive. Ann welcomed the ceaseless labour and mourned the cause. She seldom left him, listened in secret to his ravings, marvelled at utterances whose source was hidden from her, heard him laugh at the Devil and deny God.

Of old the poets conceived that the portals of sleep were two. From the gate of horn issued trustworthy

visions, and a man whose mind went forth that way, while his body slumbered, would enjoy honest dreams and receive predictions of realities to come; but out of the ivory gate came falsity, with chimeras, mirages and phantoms of things that never were and never will be. Now, through many a dark nocturnal hour, the wild children of fever played their pranks with Jesse Redvers, so that he frightened sleep from other pillows and made his watchers fearful in the waste of night. Sleep he craved yet terribly dreaded, for it brought him under dominion of demons, who tortured his mind worse than illness tormented his body. Passing for a time out of immediate suffering by the path of sleep, he sank upon no insensibility and blessed oblivion, but straightway plunged into spectral life and played a frenzied part at the centre of it. There the accumulated horrors waxed stroke upon stroke, until at last they drove him back into wakefulness through a middle region of trance that was neither sleep nor waking. Even to the antechamber of consciousness the dream things followed him. They crept hideous along the threshold of reason; they thrust their claws after him as he fled from them into reality. Only the glare of light, or human arms around him, or human voice lifted to comfort him, hurled these nameless spirits back into their Avernus.

The poison of the disease, filtering into every secret fastness of his brain, found old buried memories there, dragged them forth, habited them in the carnival clothes of fever, and set them dancing hideously. The sufferer, through those days before he sank into absolute unconsciousness at the crisis of his disease, found childhood and boyhood return upon him. He lived in the avenues of his earliest years, trotted at his father's heels, ran to answer his mother's call. But

the procession of those foremost days was refracted into grotesque and hideous chaos. His adult heart beat under a child's pinafore, his adolescent passions fired him in his mother's lap. He lay there and looked into the future and loathed the breast that he sucked, because it belonged to his father's murderess.

Once, in a long-drawn nightmare, he beheld Dartmoor transfigured. The stones were alive, the billows of the heath and herbage rose and fell, like a world breathing; the tors stalked hither and thither; the cairn on Cosdon arose and rolled to High Will; and Yes Tor, in shape of a hag whose head touched the sky, left her throne and swept away cloud-clad to the inner loneliness. Jesse called to the moving monsters and they took note of him, nodded, picked him up and let him run along their granite fingers. Rabbits swelled to the size of ponies and their huge, gentle forms pressed round him, so that he could stroke their noses and smell their thymy breath; the ponies shrivelled and shrank and scurried in legions, like rats. The air was sick and yellow, for light that never blazed beyond the confines of a poisoned dream, soaked everything. Earth, water, air, reeked with a misty and golden contagion that choked him and generated life in his mouth. His lips crawled with creatures that tasted of oil. Life fell out of the air like rain and spread thin legs and ran. Huge moor spiders sat in their silvery webs and leered with faces; the black slugs, swollen to the size of sheep, left glittering lines behind them that stretched for miles; faces were everywhere—faces of beasts half men and men half beasts. Loathsome and lecherous human countenances haunted him and stared from every stock and stone. Old, red, evil eyes, with purses of skin hanging under them, blinked out of caves and crannies; hands shot

forth and touched him and shot back. He shouted out to Heaven to send sweat to bathe him and drown these cursed fires and furies. He struggled with small spots innumerable that appeared upon his body, ran about, merged into a mass and turned him purple, then black. Now he knew that he was dead and he screamed with nightly laughter, plucked flesh off his bones, flung it to the demon things and fed them with it, like a pack of hounds.

There was a movement on that sickly Moor, and he heard whisperings and hurryings and strange sounds that never until then had touched his ear. Millions of busy, covetous beasts rushed to him to help them and show them where a far-off, dim Eldorado was, and where precious mysteries abode and the secret of eternal life lay hidden under a mountain. The way was written on his brain and only there; and they knew it, so they came to him to lead them to Eldorado and be their King. He rode on a monster with livid and decaying fur; and sometimes it galloped faster than the wind, and sometimes for centuries it stood still and slept. Now he reigned over countless abortions and abominations, and they gibbered and sobbed, and raved and raged when he told them that for them there was no life beyond the grave. The breastplate of Aaron was upon his bosom; he wore Salome's sunbonnet, and it smelt of her sweet hair. Presently a darkness, above the darkness of night or any grave, fell upon all things, and the eyes of the demon throng glimmered through it red and green; then they went out one by one, like the lights in church at the end of evening prayer. A storm burst over him and lightning painted the rain so that it swept like curtains of fire round about him. The parched earth gulped the flood and he heard its



voice ; but no drop fell upon him. He rushed to catch the water and let it cool his head, but it retreated before him and only a fiery air fed his gasping bosom and scorched his pate. The darkness lifted, the thunder died and a sweet and silvery radiance grew and heralded the moon. Semicircled she swam from a cloud, and came, and grew, and swelled until the light flooded him and he saw Night's self mother-naked between her silver horns. Such loveliness as his eyes had never seen sat cuddled on that glittering sickle ; and she cried out to him with Salome's bell-like voice and said : ' There is no God ; there are left only man and me. Come, come, come, and I will give you the keys of Heaven ; for man has killed God and the place of Him is empty. Come to me ; and you and I will bury this dead God, and you shall be God, and I will be your wife and your queen. And him — that red, laughing wretch who knew no God — even him will we torture through ten eternities, because he sat by God as he spoke and knew it not.'

The lovely paragon slipped down from her seat in the moon and came to him, and rained upon him a delicious odour of bergamot ; and kissed him with lips sweeter than any sweetness that he had known. Her eyes fed him with a feast of new thoughts. When she shut them he starved ; and when she opened them he ate and drank and burnt with hunger and thirst of unknown desires. Her flesh scorched him and blistered his skin with fire. ' I am Life !' she whispered to him. ' Life's fulness and Life's fruit. Until now you have slept ; henceforth you shall know Life's self and rise and live and dance — dance to the music of falling stars.'

He saw then a rain of golden fire that dropped upon the moon, and the planet's face responded with

a sound as far-off cymbals — monotonous, melodious and infinitely sad. The music echoed of things familiar and spoke with voices that he knew. Now it rolled and rang out sudden, like the bellowing of kine; now it deepened into the thunder of the cannon and the fainter following reverberations and dying repetitions where great shells burst; now it rippled and rose and fell like a river's song, lulled and lifted by the wind; now his mother spoke; and now his father laughed.

He danced with Life gloriously, pressed her to his heart and clipped her so close that her hair hid them both like a garment. 'For ever — for ever!' he said and voices answered, 'For ever — for ever!' Then he saw that all the hobgoblin things had come again, and their little eyes made a circle of opals where they sat round and clapped their teeth and padded the ground with their tails. Eyes were watching everywhere — some like night-lamps and some like fires, some like Michael's and some like Nathaniel Tapp's. They were headless, browless eyes, and many tears fell from them.

The dance was a delirium and a joy. Life clung closer and closer, and they grew into each other — legs — bosoms — arms and fingers. She was part of himself — his spirit — his soul. He reeled and staggered. Something touched his heart and it stopped still, then dashed on again.

The music changed and the measure changed; the foul herd of great and little goblins vanished; there was left under heaven nothing but himself and Life, the dancer. They talked so fast that their words spun a visible cloud and he cried again 'For ever!' and she answered, 'Nay, but only to the end.' He said, 'There can be no end; you shall leave my arms no

more'; and she replied, 'Fool, all things that begin must also end. Thou hast broken nature's law and it shall break thee.'

Then he saw the wheels of light that circled in her rainbow eyes grow suddenly grey and dim. Her hair began to fall away in flakes, like leaves off a sycamore when November freezes. He shuddered and tried to thrust her from him, but she was part of himself. Their bodies were one; her face was close to his and he watched it growing old under his eyes. Her forehead yellowed and wrinkled like dead fruit; her back grew round, her shoulders bent; he felt the dead weight of her and heard her joints creak.

The dance was a battle and a torture; for now Life's cancerous body clung to him like a sore. Her lovely hands were turned to feline claws deep buried in his back; her breasts stuck to him, like the suckers of a devil-fish; her teeth fell out, but with a leech's mouth she held on to his lips and sucked. Then did the very flesh and skin of her drop away; her skull nodded and shone like silver, and he struggled no more but called upon death to set him free from the glittering of her bones, that gripped him round and held him fast in a trap of ice and adamant.

And still they danced; but Life had turned into Death. Upon that supreme discovery, with its concussion and crash of terror, he awoke horribly screaming, so that all human souls leapt from slumber, and sleeping echoes also wakened, for his cry resounded beyond Harter and went out and died upon the night.

Michael it was who watched beside his brother then, and as Jesse shrieked and fought, he supposed that the end had come and shouted for his mother. In a moment her arm was under the boy's head and a cup at

his lips, while shaking, gasping, with all the dread of his dream staring from his eyes, he clung to her, called for dawn, and besought her that she would keep him away from sleep and the hidden things that lurked within it.

As the climax of the disease developed, Ann Redvers never left him. Chance ordered that Jesse spoke but once of his mother at this season, and then it happened that she herself was sitting at his side. Suddenly, after sleep, he had started up and stared at her. As she stretched her hand to him, the firelight threw its shadow huge against the ceiling. Such gravity was upon his face, such steadfastness and recognition in his eyes, that she rose thankfully to see him conscious and rational again.

"Mother," he said, "oh, mother, how is it with you?"

"Well, for that matter—if you'm better, my son——"

She gave him drink and then beat up his pillow. He lay back and spoke faintly.

"Dout<sup>1</sup> the candle again. Be the fire bright? I feel cold an' so soaking wet as if I'd walked in the river."

She tended him.

"The fire's doing brisk. Us have had a load of coal for 'e. It keeps the heat up bravely."

"Mother, I've seen your naked soul these many nights."

"Don't tell like that. Let me read to 'e."

"I must talk. I know very well what I'm saying. I've seed it—spoke to it—promised—promised."

She sighed but did not answer.

"Souls do leave their dust," he went on. "While

<sup>1</sup> *Dout* = Put out.

men sleep, their souls go round the world sometimes, an' beyond. Your soul's a sorrowful soul, mother."

"That's truth," she said, "whether you'm awake or dreaming. If you could see it, Jesse, you'd see a broken spirit as have said 'good-bye' to hope—a spirit with its back turned to heaven."

"'Twas a poor, grey, chapfallen soul, mother. Bent in the back—wi' eyes cast behind ever, like a frightened dog's. I thought 'twas no more'n a spent cloud in the sky that floated past; but it spoke—soft an' sad, like the sound of rain on the river. But the thing it said—duty—duty, mother. God's my judge, but it told me my duty—in words I'll never forget neither."

She listened with interest and prayed that he might be speaking intelligently, yet feared that he only wandered.

"Hand in hand—you an' father—I'll swear it on the Bible. Live ghosts—live souls. A soul an' a soul, to a son, to tell him his duty. An' I said, 'but duty be duty; an' duty be death.'"

"If your duty was death to me, 'twould be a blessed duty," she said. "Oh, be you sane, Jesse—be you sane while you say it? The Lord send you be sane!"

She studied his face intently and clasped her hands over his. His eyes were full of speculation in the firelight, and fixed most inquiringly upon her.

"Duty—if you could see it—if you could believe it!" she cried gently.

His head bent forward while he lifted himself and helped his lungs.

"Through wild ways; but they took me on to a sure road at last. From the footstool of God to me with a message they came—them souls."

"A message, dear heart?"

She remembered an old tradition that those of in-

firm mind, or at the gate of death, were chosen as the mouthpiece and oracle of the Everlasting.

"The message was doom to you, mother. 'Twas that I should rise up from this bed, an' live, an' give you up to punishment. An' your ghost spoke; an' his ghost nodded an' turned an' kissed your poor, woe-ful shadow. May God blot my soul out of life for ever an' ever if I'm not telling truth."

"Jesse! Jesse! 'Twas a blessed dream. If I could think ——"

"All cold, solid, bitter truth, mother; an needs must when God sends his ghosts to a man. True enough—an' I be going to do it. Who is there shall dare fly from the order of God? I've heard what I've heard—an' I'll do what I'll do. An' you needn't fret no more that I shall die, because my work's not finished. 'Tis damnation if I don't do it now."

She knelt down beside him, put her arm behind him and her other hand upon his forehead.

"If I thought that you could! I'll pray—I'll pray without ceasing for you, Jesse—for strength of mind to do this thing when your strength of body comes back. Oh, remember when you're in health again—don't forget—don't let it slip from you. 'Twill ask for trouble an' torment an' a deal of love to do it. Such love—but you'll be blessed for all eternity. It surely means there's time even yet to save your mother's soul."

She kissed him frantically and called upon God in her heart to fortify him when the great need came. Then even as she joyed and hoped, the lurking fear under her joy was justified, and she found herself fooled by a freak of disease. The fever jest was ended; as she looked Jesse's expression changed; he frowned, then laughed aloud.

"There — there — all along the wall an' every blasted letter alive! 'Break Nature's laws, an' they'll break you.' An' so they will — body an' bones. Look at 'em! Look at 'em — running an' flickering like the jacky toads in Taw Marsh! But it's true — an' I'll be ground to death in the mill an' turn to dust like father. Let 'em make roses of me — not cab-bages — 'tis a cruel cannibal thought, that. Dead by your hand, you evil witch; an' they'll hang 'e by the neck — they will. 'Twas no great odds that you broke God's laws, mother, so you needn't weep about that; for He breaks His own an' murders His own childer in cold blood. But man — living man — his laws have got to be kept by the living. He'll hang 'e — an' so would I if I'd strength to do it — hang 'e to the roof of the well, I would. You've got a murderer's face, an' I won't trust you. Keep off your bloody hands from my forehead. Keep 'em off, I say; they'll stain — they'll stain for ever! Help, Michael — Nat —! She'll do for me!"

Thus that fitful ray of light across the dark went out for Ann. Her son had spoken the first word as unconsciously as he screamed the last. She knew that when he returned to his senses, if he survived, the thought and possibility of such an action as he had promised would be far from him. So she ministered to him and soothed him, and forgot her grief in much serving. Yet there woke a wild wish in her heart that he might leap from his couch and fulfil his promise, while still the fever urged him to it.

Upon the day that followed this scene with his mother, Jesse became wholly unconscious and lay for a season in the very extremity of danger; then a constitution nurtured with the purity of the upland air, and built out of hardy generations, won this battle

and he escaped from death. There came a blessed night when sleep fell upon him like the balm of Heaven, and he awoke from a period of perfect rest.

"Mother, mother, thank God they fearful fever fairies have gone," he said. "I've slept without a dream!"

Thereupon in his profound weakness he wept and his weary mother wept with him. Soon Doctor Blight lifted his head from Jesse's back and breast with more hopeful eyes. The trouble steadily resolved and air found its way back again into the deep chambers of the lungs. Absolute feebleness of mind and body followed this long struggle, and it was many days before young Redvers could leave his bed. When he saw himself in a glass he became strangely affected, for his bearded face was like a vision, dark and haggard, of his dead father.

Somebody always sat with him and neighbours called and cheered him with their talk as he gained strength. Least of all he liked the companionship of Mr. Tapp; but Nathaniel insisted on taking his turn with the rest, and there came a day when he spoke most seriously to the convalescent patient.

"You'm well enough to hear me now," he said; "an' like it or lump it, I be going to speak, for 'tis my duty. You've had something a long sight worse than sickness the matter with you, my son; an' 'tis well you should know it, for seemingly you don't."

"I've had terrible thoughts, I know that, Nat."

"You have an' a vengeance—thoughts bad enough to damn an' roast the whole of Belstone. Hell an' all that bide therein have broken loose in your head. Such awful things you spoke that 'twould have been no surprise to me if the place had been drowned in a whirlwind of pitch an' sulphur, like Sodom."



"Fever — I was mad —"

"Not you! You've had a devil — that's what you've had! Better sight than mine might have seed the thing looking out of your eyes. Often an' often I've gabbed the Bible till I 'most choked myself, to keep him down. A fleering, sniggering, blasphemous devil he was, an' spoke with your voice such things as none but a devil could say, for they never comed into the mind of a man. Such things as he was damned for saying, no doubt. I axed parson to come over once; an' the night that us thought you was going to die, he comed; but, of course, just because he was there in all the holiness of his calling, the devil kept mum as a mouse till parson had said his prayers for you an' gone home. Then, at the peep of day, when 'twas my turn to watch an' you seemed stronger, be shot if he didn't begin again — just after I'd gived 'e a drink of barley-water an' brandy!"

Jesse thought of his mother. He often wondered since return to life how much concerning her had entered into his ravings.

"What did I say, Nat? Some wild trash about other folk, no doubt. I dreamed of murders an' horrors without number."

"'Twasn't you but that unholy Thing as had crept in. It laughed at God, an' said that to call Him a Loving Father was man's silly idea. It flouted faith, poked devil's fun at conscience, an' said there was no such place as Heaven. Sour grapes for a fallen devil to say that, I reckon! Then he pretended as there wasn't no Hell neither. Think of it — the artfulness! An' him just come from there with such poisonous words as only could be hatched there. An' you harbouring him, like a pear harbours a maggot. That's the terrible thing! You must have sunk cruel low in

your thoughts, Jesse Redvers, afore any such fearful masterpiece of horror could happen to 'e. The Lord of Hosts be turned from you, no doubt, ever since you said there weren't no hell fire. 'A Godless world,' says your devil; 'Tis all machine-made an' machine-run,' he says; 'Be true to yourself,' he says; 'God don't mind the Bible no more than the heathen do,' he says; an' much more such evil, higgledy-piggledy devil's talk. He shouted for all he was worth, I promise you; but I mastered un now an' then. I held you down with one hand an' kept Baxter up in the light of the night-lamp an' gived it to him hot an' strong, till he'd get quieter an' quieter, an' lie down an' pant, like a beast that's overdriven. Though that holy book of Baxter's was written for man an' not devils, yet it shook him to his fiery bones. He'd whine like a babby now an' again; an' then, when I'd properly cowed him, he'd creep out of 'e unseen for a season an' go his way, an' you'd get sleep."

"Devil or no devil, Nat, he's gone for good."

"That lies wi' you. 'Tis for you to keep him out. No devil ever entered a man unless the door was opened from inside."

"I'll try hard an' be a better chap, Nathaniel."

"Yes, do," said Mr. Tapp. "You'll need a deal of cleansing after that black fiend have haunted your soul, an' used your throat an' lips to spit out his venom against Heaven. When you'm on your legs again, I pray you to put your best foot foremost in the ways of Godliness. There's a lot of wasted time an' lost ground to make good. You must lie here a week more, so doctor says; an' I be going to lend a hand with your conscience myself. An' what I say is, 'the Lord be thanked you was too ill to know the things your devil spoke.' I've got salvation, thanks be to

my Saviour, an' his wicked nonsense was no more to me than a drop of rain on my hat; but he might have shook a weak-minded Christian here an' there; an' that was his game, no doubt."

## CHAPTER X

### COLD COMFORT

NATURE has ordered that the transports of all suffering shall be intermittent, else every human mind noble enough to feel great grief would break. Such burning miseries, such reigns of terror in the soul may leave only the transient disasters of a tropical hurricane and presently vanish in the luxuriant vitality of a healthy and vigorous but mean intellect; or they may stamp an everlasting impress upon body and mind, and write a record indelible as that of the lightning where it shatters a mountain's crown and changes the contour of a crag for ever. The past, while sealing to itself both spirit and countenance of Ann Redvers, had increased rather than diminished her austere beauty. Strength was always a part of its distinction, and now sorrow contributed a marmoreal pallor and stateliness, and by finally fixing its accentuations at those points where the emotions take visible shape, had altered her expression. Grief sat at the inner limit of her eyebrows and knotted them permanently. Her upper lids had fallen somewhat, as though set to hide a little of the eyes beneath them. The angle of the mouth was lowered, and about the corners of it, where are attached those muscles mysteriously connected with facial expression of unhappiness, the elasticity was gone and the curves down-drawn for ever. But that languid and helpless droop of misery, which leaves human lips

open to draw the air a mournful heart may need for uttering of sighs, was not manifest upon her face. Her beautiful but small-lipped mouth remained close shut even oftener than of old, for she spoke less than formerly and found a nod of affirmation or a shake of negation answer most simple questions in the affairs of daily life. Her animation was decreased in a manner palpable to all observers; her voice was slower and of a deeper note—not sorrowful, but impassive. Her actions were carried out more leisurely; feeling she seldom displayed under press of circumstances. To the chance observer it appeared that her husband's death had altered her character in certain particulars. Spectators marvelled that the bond between Anthony and Ann, supposed most trivial, had in reality been of a nature so radically alive. Interest increased concerning her and commiseration grew; but few so far presumed upon the past as to offer more than respectful silence concerning it. All felt, without being told, that Mrs. Redvers was not one to seek spoken sympathy, or desire words laden with the emotion of pity.

She lived her inner life alone, save for those shadowy and secret Eumenides that haunt the heart. To her the immortal avengers came clothed in the raiments of her own religion. With remorse they scourged, and true daughters of Earth and Night were they, for upon sleep-deserted pillows they surprised her, or solitary in the fields, or wandering where spread desolate and unseen places of the central Moor. Deliberately she chose their retribution and sought their supremest pains—by day beyond the reach of human voices, by night sequestered from life in the midst of life, at the hour when all things slept and left her waking. Then the thong fell upon her naked spirit and the spectacle of life in death eternal came close and clear as moon-

light. She roamed with darkness. Time slept for her; the hours danced no more but, leaden-footed, dragged out their melancholy measures in an endless chain. Nothing could deaden her remorse, no nepenthe could soothe the unsleeping furies that drove her on through day and night, through winter and summer ceaselessly. Had anodyne been offered, she had refused it.

Her sick son indeed served as an enduring distraction, and the physical weariness begot of much watching was repaid with sleep; but now he had entered upon convalescence and the struggle to regain strength. Renewed vigour returned to him slowly, yet sure progress was maintained, and Jesse enjoyed the time in a measure, for he achieved some importance by the accident of his recovery, and neighbours, as occasion served, would pay visits, to congratulate him upon his escape.

But most he desired the company of his mother and his brother. For a season some return of friendship obtained between Jesse and Michael. Both perceived it, and the younger, not understanding that the sentimental accident of Jesse's dangerous illness had drawn him, supposed honestly that henceforth their lives would be more closely united. Often they talked together but never of the past. Michael approached as nearly as he dared to the subject, for he much desired to hear his brother's last conclusion and hoped that now essential differences were dead and that they thought alike.

But Jesse avoided that topic, though it was very often in his mind, and even light of a sort, in his opinion, had fallen upon it. He brooded concerning a side of the conversation between the trout-fishers, and at last, believing his grasp of the contention clear, ap-

proached his mother herself upon the subject, and spoke to her of the dogma of sin.

After some preliminary words, which sounded vague enough now committed to the voice, Jesse proceeded.

"If the sinfulness of a deed be only a matter of opinion—so to say—and if there's a doubt in wise brains whether 'twill hold water, ban't you in a better case than you thought, mother?"

She started and stared at him, so that he read her suspicion in her eyes.

"No, no—don't think that. I'm cool an' so sane as you. There's guilt an' there's sin—two different things. You might be guilty an' yet sinless——"

"Where did you pick up this stuff—in fever dreams? No such thing as sin! What's here—deep down here?"

"Conscience," he said eagerly. "An' that's only another name for all you have learnt. Can't you see that if you'd learnt it was good to kill?—at least—don't look at me like that, mother. You freeze me. I'm only trying to lighten the load that conscience is crushing you down under. Sin's only a word—not known afore Christ came—an idea of the mind that depends on what you've been taught. How d'you know you've been taught right? How d'you know Michael ban't wiser than you? Anyway, there's two sides to the question and——"

"Stop!" she cried, "else I'll say that Tapp told truth, an' that some dark thing out of hell have been along with you. Oh, Jesse—you that I knowed was right from the first—don't go back on your own self like this, my son, an' invent silly lies to tempt your mother! There's but one way to look at me, an' that's God Almighty's way. 'Twould double damn me to try to see differently. Words—words—what

be words? All the words ever poured out of man's mouth never yet blotted one little deed. An' how much more this deed. You can think deep an' witty. Think yourself what I am. Think you're wedded an' have turned an' murdered half yourself. They go an' come an' put their faces solemn, because they suppose they be looking at a lone woman afflicted by God — not a tigress that's drunk her own blood. He was part of me. 'Tis murder an' suicide both to kill a husband. An' I might have been patient. My conscience has always called to me to be patient. I — that prided myself on never letting anger master me — I might have remembered the great love he had for me. I might have offered to forgive him just once more. I might have remembered the forgiving Lord. . . . Sin — sin you say — 'sin only a word'! An' you've lived for more'n twenty years in the world. Sin not knowed afore He came? What was knowed afore He came? Nought. But He knowed the sight of it, an' felt it in the evil air that He turned man to breathe for our sakes. He saw sin rotting the root of human kind — poisoning the blood of every baby that's born — sucked from every human mother since Eve."

"Never — never! 'Tis a damnable saying that the li'l ones come sinful into the world. Sin's a ghost — a scarecrow to fright us all into the parson's clutches. Live on, mother, an' justify your days an' do good with both hands, as you be doing."

"Yes — live on wi' truth eating my bowels alive. So I do — so I shall. The wages of my sin be life — not death. Death's too easy. Life — long life here — eternal life there — hell without morn or eve, or seasons, or years — that's my portion — writ down on the day that I comed into the world."

"I'd go mad if I thought that. An' you won't



think it for ever. You can't think it an' still say that your God is love. There's a time coming when you'll see different, mother. If there's any God at all, He won't let you suffer for ever."

"Yes, He must," she said. "'Tis my appointed doom. No shadow of turning with Him. He'm just. I've deserved it. Christ's own blood can't wash them as open-eyed live in a lie. An' here's another grief to see you—my firstborn—drift away from the old Light an' doubt your heavenly Father."

He laughed bitterly.

"My kind, heavenly Father, as have planned for my earthly mother to roast in red-hot, raging Hell for eternity! An' me an' Michael an' Anthony Redvers in the golden city with the happy angels. Do you know what Michael said when us quarrelled six months ago? He said, 'You can go after your father to Heaven, since you be so cock-sure he's got there. An' I'll go with mother; an' if I found that she was where I wasn't, I'd break out of Heaven to get to her, an' not a million angels should keep me from her. Hell's my eternal home, if 'tis hers,' he said. But 'tis all talk, for he knows in his heart that death be the end—same as I do."

"The choice be ours—death or life," she said. "We be free agents—to the least of us."

"That's what we are not," he answered. "There's no free will, mother, if you could only understand."

Her reply showed power of reasoning.

"No free will? Then what right have Almighty God to judge us and condemn us?"

"Exactly so," he answered eagerly. "No free will, no damnation—not if God's just as you say He is."

"Fight these devilish thoughts. Pray—pray, Jesse. Don't give over praying—cling to that. Jesus Christ

will come back to you if you don't cut yourself clean away. Prayer's a sure link. He's saved your life for His own ends. Let your first care be when you can go upon your knees to thank Him for that."

"Never again," he answered. "I've done wi' praying to empty air. I'll pray to you, as loves me, an' to Michael, an' to Nat Tapp, whose soul be sore for me—creatures all with hearts an' ready tears—not to the blind, deaf sky an' the Thing behind it that don't care a curse if I live or die. I'll thank you an' my earthly father for my life, because you built me so tough an' strong. An' your tireless watch by night, an' the cleverness of Doctor Blight. Those are the things that saved me alive. There—leave me alone for a bit, mother. My heart's raging up into my throat afore the thought of all you suffer. Go out of my sight, dear mother, for a little."

So failed his effort to thaw away some of the frozen agony that held her spirit bound as though in hell's last, deepest horror of ice. Her he blamed not, but himself. How could he, with his raw, nameless gospel and message shake her deep, intrinsic and indigenous beliefs? He knew that his confused ideas broke like a foaming wave against the adamantine cliffs of her Christianity. She declared to him that she was doomed, and he rebelled with all his reason against her conviction and puzzled his brains how to assault this ghastly fortress lifted in her mind. Then he remembered her recent assertion of the vanity of words. No word, nor wilderness of words, could alter the least deed. This was true. It called for a deed to erase the consequence of a deed. She held that Christ's death was necessary to blot the results of Adam's fall; yet she put herself beyond the pale of that universal sacrifice. Her case stood outside divine deeds to condone, above possi-

bility of alteration or addition. It was embalmed in time past, to endure with all its consequence for eternity.

This mighty error of his mother was impregnable to his weakness and nebulous opinions; and for the time, therefore, he abandoned the problem of lessening her torments and examined his own unrest. He was proud of himself for having thrown over the faith of his fathers. He felt that he had accomplished a noble liberation. He set about stamping from his mind the obsolescent principles learned from his parents; and he tried to substitute larger lessons of modern charity founded on knowledge. A guide was absolutely vital at this most pregnant and dangerous period of his spiritual existence; but no guide existed for him. The seed had fallen on fruitful soil, but there was none to tend its germination.

There came a Sunday when Joshua Bloom and Mr. Tapp kept Jesse company while Michael and his mother went to morning service at Belstone.

"I've looked in to cheer you up, my son," said old Bloom. "'Tis a very great thing for a sick youth to have bright faces in his eyes an' hopeful speaking in his ears. It helps to build up the constitution. God knows I ban't a bright-faced man, nor yet cheerful, by reason of the times; but what a fellow-creature may do, that will I."

"I'm sure you will," said Jesse, "an' I'm very glad to see you, Joshua. I've had a squeak for it."

"So they tell me. An' you must never think to be the same man again, for you won't be. You'll bear the marks on your inward parts to the grave, an' go there that much the sooner. So best get used to the thought. Not but what care an' caution won't give 'e many good years yet."

Jesse was quick to catch the despondent note.

"I know—I know. An' little enough I care. Life's no great gift that I can see."

"You'm young yet to say so. But certainly your opinion be the usual one after middle-age. Of course you've heard tell of my calamities?"

"Nothing new, I suppose?"

Mr. Bloom assumed a moist and mournful cheerfulness, like the sun seen through dropping clouds.

"Then I'll tell 'e the black tale. I thought I'd told everybody from here to Okehampton, but of course you've been beyond the reach of news lately. Arscott sacked me a while ago! Ess he did—actually sacked me at a word! An' if I hadn't pretty near knelt down to him, he'd have kept to it. But I went back on my manhood for the sake of my old sisters, an' beseeched him as if he was the King of kings; so it ended in him knocking half-a-crown a week off my money an' letting me stay on disgraced in the sight of the nation. Damn the stone-hearted carmudgeon! If I wasn't a religious man, I'd lie behind a hedge for him."

"I'm terrible sorry to hear it. A cruel shame," said Jesse. "'Tis happening everywhere an' driving everybody to the towns."

Bloom nodded, dried his mouth and made answer.

"The curse of all body labour be that a man gets less an' less money just when he begins to want more. If you work with your brain parts, the older you grow the usefuller you grow up to full ripeness. Why, a man may hold his own at four score if he's been a careful liver an' not kept his wick burning too high. But once a labourer have gone in the back an' thighs, an' grewed tissicky in the breathing parts—then, if he haven't raised up them of his own loins to keep him

out of the workhouse, there he'll go. The state don't do no more for us people of the earth than it do for common soldiers — not even so much."

"For that matter, there's many a son an' daughter as don't sleep the worse for knowing their parents be in the poor-house," declared Jesse. "But you — so wise in granite as you be — 'tis an infernal shame."

"Ah! — if I'd but kept my wisdom to myself! But you know me. Any man had but to ax to get answered. My deep knowledge of granite can be drawed up like water from a well. An' so it have been. There's them at the quarries that know so much as me. Of course he set 'em on in secret to suck me dry. There's a working Christian for 'e! I see it all — too late."

"But surely William Arscott ——"

"Too late, my son. You mark this, Jesse. When you'm young you can't see out of an open window, an' when you'm old, you can see through a wheat stack — but it's too late then. All my hoarded wisdom don't make me an hour less than my age. Ess, I be wise, no doubt, but I can't begin again, an' all that I know will mighty soon be running to seed in Okehampton Union. Ah, here's Nathaniel. Marnin', Mr. Tapp. I've just been tellin' Jesse here what that anointed rascal have done to me."

"Then I lay you be in a very savage frame of mind, Joshua. 'Tis a hard case, an' he's a hard man. If you'll take my advice, you'll just listen to me a bit. I've fetch'd along Baxter to read to Jesse, an' it may help to calm your mind to listen also."

The patient tossed restlessly.

"Can't you be easy for once, Nat, an' leave all that, an' cheer me with a bit of talk?"

"Not on Sunday," said Mr. Tapp. "No man can

be more gladsome and worldly—in reason—than me of a working-day, or on a holiday morning; but you'll find no lightness in me of a Sabbath, an' you ought to know it by now, Jesse."

"I'm sure I've tried to cheer you," declared Mr. Bloom. "'Tis well known nought soothes the human mind like other people's bad luck."

"An' I'll tell 'e everybody's bad luck," resumed Nathaniel Tapp, opening his book. "An' as to bracing your spirits up, if Baxter can't, nothing can. Never a man wrote like him. He lashes you, like the Lord lashed they money-changers at the temple door. Hark to this. I was reading it to my Sarah last night—to sleep upon—an' I put a mark in."

Mr. Tapp's eyes blazed into Jesse's. Then he sat down beside the bed, while Joshua Bloom put his hands in his pockets, walked to the window and looked out of it.

"He might have had you in his eye, Jesse. He might have writ for you alone. Hear to him:—

*"Can you make so light of heaven and hell? Your corpse will shortly lie in the dust, and angels or devils will shortly seize your souls, and every man or woman of you will shortly be among other company and in another case than you are now. . . . O what a light will you shortly see in heaven or hell; O what thoughts will shortly fill your hearts with unspeakable joy or horror! what work will you be employed in? To praise the Lord with Saints and angels, or cry out in the fire unquenchable with devils? And should all this be forgotten? And all this will be endless and sealed up by an unchangeable decree. Eternity, eternity will be the measure of your joys or sorrows, and can this be forgotten? And all this is true, sirs, most certainly true. When you have gone up and down a little longer——"*

Jesse leapt from his bed, then staggered and fell back upon it.

"Go—go!" he cried passionately. "Get out of my sight—the pair of you! I can't stand no more. I'll scream if you drone another word of that damned uncharitable trash to me. Get out of my sight, Nat Tapp, an' you, too, Joshua Bloom. A death's head be gayer company for a sick man. A decent dog would cheer me better."

"'Tis very interesting about hell, all the same," said Mr. Bloom. "Thought of it never brings such a perspiration out of me as it do out of Nathaniel; but Arscott being what he be, it's given me a new interest in the place."

"*'A firebrand in hell for ever'*—that's Baxter's word," concluded Mr. Tapp, calmly shutting his book. "An' I'm sorry to think the prophecy have come home to any under this roof. I'll go, since you can't abear the hot truth. Your devil have come back, Jesse Redvers—come back to bide, by the look of it. An' sorry I am. Think of what the next world means. Come on, Bloom. If I can't help the poor youth, 'tis certain you can't. So follow me an' leave him to his awful thoughts."

"'Tis the likes of you make good men lust to do wicked things an' use foul words, for sheer hatred of such filthy cant!" cried Jesse.

Whereupon Mr. Tapp looked up at the ceiling, sighed, and stalked solemnly from the sick chamber; while Joshua glanced round, bestowed a hesitating and nervous wink on Jesse, and then hurried after Nathaniel.

## CHAPTER XI

### BARBARA'S PLAN

ON the great day of ewe-market, Barbara and Salome held gloomy converse concerning their father's future. Mr. Westaway started early to Okehampton, but it was not until after noon that the women talked together. Then they walked down into Halstock Glen to meet the flock-master on his homeward way.

"Us must think about it serious, for it begins to get nearer an' nearer," said Salome.

"If thinking would help—I'm sure I've thought an' thought till I've thought a pit between my eye-brows," answered Barbara. "But 'tis doing now, not thinking, if we want to keep a roof over his head."

"You'm frightened of Arscott, yet he's patient enough seemingly," said Salome.

"So's a lot of other nasty things," said Barbara. "For why? They can afford to be. A spider's patient—so's a toad. Well may Arscott be patient! His patience is growing gold for hisself, same as the patience of the earth grows corn. He'm charging compound interest, an' that's a thing—so Hannaford told me—that grows, like bindweed underground, till it spreads an' spreads an' you suddenly find yourself choked with it."

"He'll swallow up the life insurance?"

"Certainly he will. He'll wait—so Hannaford said—till what us owe be all us have got, and then



for his three hundred he'll get five or more, an' we'm sold-up to find it."

"I suppose that will mean a cottage for faither, an' us going into service."

"No, it won't," said Barbara. "He could never face life without me at his elbow. We can't leave him. I've got my ideas, however. Something has to be managed, an' since we can't do it single, we must see if we can do it double."

"What do 'e mean by that?"

"We must marry, to be plain."

"Takes two for that. 'Tis easier said than done."

"Not for you, Sally. All the world knows how Jesse Redvers be wearing his heart out for 'e. He'd bless the day that you said 'yes' to him; an' of course he'm very well-to-do indeed; an' what you can't take from him now, you could take if he was your husband."

"'Husband — husband,'" echoed Salome. "'Tis a curious word to my ear."

"The word ban't half so curious as the thing, if wives tell true. But there it is."

"An' you, Barbara?"

The elder woman blushed slightly and looked nervously round about her, as though she were about to cast off a robe and bathe in the river.

"I be going to talk to William Arscott," she said.

"You poor dear girl! Don't you do that. No, no, Barbara. Never shall you wreck your good life that way. Service would be a million times easier. A market bargain! Never another minute of peace would faither have."

"Oh yes, he would," answered Barbara gloomily. "There'd be peace an' plenty all round. The man would straighten faither out quick enough then, an'

settle the creditors, if only for his own self-respect. As a husband he'd be safe as a rock."

"An' as hard. I can very well picture the chimney corner as Billy Arscott would make for faither! But why him? He'm not the only bachelor man in the country. There's a many would come forward if they had any thought you wanted a husband——"

"No doubt," admitted Barbara. "I know two—to name no names. But 'tis the money. Them as would have me haven't got none worth mentioning."

"Anyway, you shan't do it. I'd never forgive you; an' you'd never forgive yourself; an' it would break our old dear's heart. Bide a little. There's Jesse as you say."

Barbara reflected some time before answering.

"I'm a selfish beast," she said at last. "Here I worrit you to take a chap, but never thought what you might feel about it, though you can think for me. You'm kinder than what I am. Of course I never saw Jesse an' marriage from your point of view."

"No," answered Salome half to herself. "No, nor nobody else—nor nobody ever will, nor can."

Salome became much abstracted and her mind only perceived that Barbara continued to talk, but she did not hear the words. Her own thoughts had plunged her deep into memory.

"'Tis selfish, but I can't help it," continued the elder. "Faither's first in my mind, an' always will be. Talk about me being his child—I do always feel more as if he was mine. But, all the same, if you can't like young Redvers any more than I can abide that Arscott—why—there it is. Us have got our duty to ourselves to think about, an' religion's all against selling yourself, no doubt."

She continued to talk, while Salome pondered silently upon this problem.

An aspect of the matter presently to come uppermost determined her; but for the moment she was occupied with certain superficial advantages of an engagement to Jesse Redvers. She reflected upon the position that such an understanding would establish, and she perceived that it must be possible for Jesse, as her accepted suitor, instantly to do the thing he desired to do and assist her straitened home. Of what might come afterward she did not stop to think. Marriage with him was, of course, not thinkable. That she must act a lie scarcely troubled her. Bare regret for the man hurt her and quickly passed. She did not even love him well enough to be sorry for him. With Jesse it would be possible easily to postpone the actual event and evade marriage indefinitely. But between Barbara and Arscott no such policy could serve. The granite merchant might choose to be wedded before Christmas, for he was not of the male stuff that humbly waits a woman's pleasure. Jesse, on the other hand, would obey Salome's will, and a clear year of liberty at least he should grant as preliminary price of a promise. During that time her father's affairs could be bettered. Thus swiftly she planned this act of theft, then turned from consideration of details and spoke to Barbara.

"Jesse Redvers is a good enough young man, an' there's a great deal I like in him—more than he knows. If he'll give me a year— Anyway, he shan't have 'no' for an answer next time he axes."

"Will he ax again?"

"Will the moon rise again? He'll ax."

"You'm a brave woman, and I shan't be behind you. You see, there'd be no call for faither to give up Watchett Hill then, when us got straighter; for if

I was married, 'twould be a condition that I didn't leave our old dear while he lived. But you'd go. I wonder how Mrs. Redvers would like turning her back on Harter?"

"Needn't run on so fast as that, I reckon. She won't mind going, anyway, for she's often said so to Jesse, an' to faither too. In his simple way faither told Mrs. Redvers that Jesse was running after me. An' she said that she'd be very glad to see him with a wife for his comfort. Of course she'd go."

Barbara nodded.

"There's faither hisself coming up the valley along with Paul Lethbridge," she said.

And while his daughters had thus debated heroic action on his behalf, Mr. Westaway, in an amiable and didactic mood, was uttering wise saws for the benefit of a boy. The farmer had prospered but reasonably well. Still, there was money in his pocket, and the effect of that circumstance always soothed him into a sanguine trust and large amiability.

"You must never forget that honesty's the best policy," he said. "Down to market you'll see some chaps overreaching others, some under-selling, an' some lying an' doing all manner of hookem-snivey deeds; and many you'll find as straight an' above-board as every Christian should be. This day I've been treated properly and I've been treated wrongly. Some have dealt honest, man to man; some have bested me to my face. I forgive them. 'Tis they that have suffered by it, not me. Never you hanker for a shady shilling when your conscience says 'ninepence,' my son. The odd threepenny bits will all go in the wrong scale at the finish, remember."

"All the same, 'tis they uncertain chaps drive the

best hosses. As young as I am, I've noticed that," answered Lethbridge.

"An' very praiseworthy in you to be so quick at human nature. I'd not marked it myself, but 'tis quite a thing you might expect. The green bay tree be the Bible image of 'em. For my part I'd sooner die in the workhouse, like an honest man, than fade away in a marble palace, with all the doctors in London swarming round my pillow. That is, if I'd come by the riches improperly. 'Tis pretty generally allowed, I believe, that the wicked don't die easy. They see things, an' 'tis often made terrible clear at the finish what they've got to expect after — poor souls."

Master and boy tramped along through the glen and Joseph pursued another train of thought.

"Dallybuttons! but land be a great idea when you see a lot spread out all to once! An' if you don't happen actually to own it, the next best thing be to rent it. I often swell up in secret as I walk around Watchett Hill an' think 'tis mine so long as the rent's paid."

"Ban't much use such a lot o' grazing, if you haven't got nought to eat the grass," said Paul doubtfully.

"There's sense in that," admitted the old man. "Sense of a small sort. But at my age, Lethbridge, the ideas get larger an' ban't disturbed with petty questions. 'Tis the greatness of the thought of land — a bit of the face of the solid earth — spread for your service, an' at your service to do what you please with. To know 'tis yours — field after field — to be a Duke of the Kingdom an' own more than you can see from the top of a hill. 'Tis a most majestic picture!"

"All the same, you want beasts on grass."

"Certainly you do. Beasts an' grass be two halves

of a whole — one no use without t'other, like the sides of a flail. But that's beside the question. A landed proprietor be a very solemn thought above small details of beasts an' fodder. An' solemnner still when you think how much more he's generally got than he deserves. If Christ A'mighty had been spared, I make no doubt that in course of time every man in the world would have had his bit of land an' little lew corner on the earth to call his very own."

"Wouldn't never go round," declared Lethbridge.

"But it would," answered old Joseph positively. "If the Saviour could swell a quartern loaf till it fed the people of a parish, then He could swell a parish into a county, an' make the whole earth just so big as would meet the case. Never you say nought can't be done when you'm talking about high matters like Bible miracles, Paul. 'Tis dangerous an' may make people think you'm not a true born Christian."

As he uttered this warning, Mr. Westaway arrived at the passage of Oke and caught sight of his daughters waiting for him on the other bank of the river.

"Ha, ha — an' what's in the wind betwixt you pretty maidens?" he asked, after plodding across the stepping-stones with the boy to guide him and steady his feet.

"Us have been thinking how to keep the bailiffs out," answered Barbara bluntly, and her father's face lost its cheerful ardour. His mouth opened and shook; his hand went down into his coat pocket, where lay three little presents — one for each of his daughters and one for Mrs. Haycraft.

"You didn't ought to say things like that, my dear," he protested. "Ban't respectful to a leading man in the parish, let alone a father that loves his childer same as I love you an' Sally."

"You frisk on an' tell Mrs. Haycraft to fry the bacon," said Barbara to Paul. "You can pop straight up the hill through the fuzz brakes, an' we'll go round by the road."

Lethbridge obeyed, and after he was gone, Salome cheered her parent and praised him mightily when she heard the market figures. But Barbara knew that they were not good.

A mournful silence fell and the old flock-master sighed as well as puffed while he climbed the hill. Then they came home together and passed in between the ranks of silent, silver-shining dummy men, that stood round about impassive and indifferent.

## CHAPTER XII

### SUNSET

JESSE REDVERS found life a joyless thing when the comforts of convalescence were swept away and he faced his world again. A sort of anti-climax obtruded upon him, and circumstances combined to intensify the experience. Ample leisure now offered for thought, and the medicine of work was no longer held to his lips at dawn, for winter approached; the ranges were deserted and the guns had ceased their thunder.

Jesse now discovered that his mind was settling upon the new theories. An unsatisfied and unhappy outlook marked this stage of thought. He desired to learn more; he longed for some rule of conduct, some teacher, some clear voice that he could obey. His impulses were vivid and powerful; they tended towards good, but they were rudderless; and now between the two great dominating ideas of his mind he tossed in deep futility. To Michael it seemed that his brother was retreating upon the old road. They had quarrelled again and had differed with bitterness concerning their mother.

There came a day when Jesse returned at twilight from a long and lonely walk. Ann blamed him and warned him against over-much physical fatigue.

"I've been 'pon top of Cosdon—to think," he answered.

"Climbing again! You'd do wiser to keep on the



low ground, my dear, for the air is shrewd on top of the hills by night."

"Climbing—climbing—but you'll need to climb higher than Cosdon to climb away from a coward," growled Michael, who still smarted under harsh words recently uttered.

Jesse looked coldly upon him and answered as he left the kitchen,

"Maybe. Cowards are of many sorts. If you was to think oftener an' talk less, you might see a little clearer than you do that your own sort o' cowardice is killing your mother."

"He'll drive me mad!" cried Michael when the elder was gone. "This sickness have turned him back into his old, rotten self again—just when I thought——"

"Nay, don't speak so. You don't know half that's burning in him. He loves me too in his deep way. His mind have had a terrible upheaval along o' the fever."

"He'm a wretched creature now an' don't believe in nothing. Who can trust a man as believes nought? He says there ban't no sure case even for God A'mighty. 'Tis like living with a dead soul in the house to hear him."

"He wants my spirit to be at peace."

"Why for can't he leave it at peace then, an' look to his own? You to be talked to an' preached to by the Godless likes of him! You, so generous an' gentle an' patient! 'Tisn't your spirit, but his father's that frets him. He don't care a cuss about you, or me. I wish he'd died when he was at the edge of the pit, for he's a useless coward."

"Listen, Michael—you that be love an' light to me. 'Tis a great grief that you can't see how Jesse looks at life. He's far off what you think him. He's

as wishful as you are to help me. When he was ill, he made my heart jump with hope. But the things he promised then were only shadows of his real mind. He'd never do 'em in his right senses. He's full of shifty dodges to cheat Satan by the twisting of words. A lot of wicked nonsense he's gathered from somewhere, poor boy. If talking could make the past different, he'd do it. 'Tis because I've refused once for all to listen to another word on that matter that he's so cranky of late. May God teach him better. He came to me full of a fever-born tale that sin ban't a live, everlasting thing. He thinks 'tis an invention. He tried to hearten me with that — poor Jesse!”

“He'm right there, perhaps.”

“You're both love-mad for your mother — else you wouldn't fight an' he wouldn't fret. An' for me there's nought left but to forgive you for your great love, Michael boy. 'Tis a doom beyond doom's power to measure. Christ died to save me from it; but even His Death won't serve now. But you've done what you thought right; I bless you rising an' lying down; an' Jesse too.”

The man scowled.

“You say I am standing between you an' your eternal hope; an' 'tis my brother that makes you say it, an' tells you so without words. What do he know about eternal hope — or eternal anything else but his eternal self? Don't love like mine count for nought up in Heaven? Did Jesus Christ, as lived an' died afore you were born, love you like I do? I'm your own flesh — the blood in your heart be the blood in mine — an' I'd die ten million deaths for 'e an' be crucified through eternity rather than you should be lost. An', mark me, that'll count, if 'tis true that God puts love afore all.”

Mrs. Tapp entered suddenly and Michael turned to her.

"Jesse 'tis we'm troubled for," he said.

"He wants a wife," declared Sarah Tapp. "I've seen it ever since he got well. He'm at the silly age when men axes for admiration an' other things that only a loving woman can give 'em. Every young cockerel wants his hen to tell him what a proper handsome chap he be."

"I wish Salome Westaway would have him," answered Michael; "then maybe life might run a bit calmer."

"I can't understand why for she don't," answered the old woman. "An' such a comely youth now his beard's grown; an' especially seeing that the work-house will be the next word for all they Westaways — so my man says."

"A little peace from his mournful eyes an' sad voice," continued Michael. "'Twould be a great blessing. A live girl to moon after might occupy his spare time, if nothing else."

"Certainly he've had the black dog upon his shoulder a good deal off an' on of late. That young woman — though she haven't got her sister's sense — be still a bowerly maid an' no fool. She knows her duty, I'm sure. A girl must do her share when she takes her husband. A man certainly expects a tidy lot one way an' another, but as a class they be reasonable — if they've got religion. An' the first rule, if you want to be easy in your home, is to make your husband so."

"She won't have him, however," asserted Michael.

"Give her time. She'll see clearer when the pinch tightens at Watchett Hill."

"I could wish it for him," said Jesse's mother.

"Then I should go from here an' live in a small house. 'Twould suit me very well to do so."

But Mrs. Tapp protested at this idea.

"Harter wi'out 'e, ma'am! Us couldn't picture such a frame of mind. 'Twould be contrary to nature."

"'Twould have to be for certain, Sarah."

"An' if mother goes, I go too," declared Michael.

"An' for my part I wouldn't hold it any grief to go."

A week later the thing desired was discussed by other lips, for Jesse Redvers met Salome by appointment and talked with her. Not seldom she or her sister went a short railway journey to Ashbury, a village between Okehampton and Holsworthy. Upon the day that she promised to meet young Redvers, she was to return from this expedition by the road that winds from Okehampton railway station under Halstock and through the glen of Oke.

A deserted quarry gapes here, cleft into the wooded hill, and from this site of old industry, man has delved much iron-stone and left a mighty wound; but the scar now attains to beauty and harmony under the touch of the master builder. Its weathered strata sloping from left to right, offer a theme of many colours where brown and red and chrome are mingled in sheets and splashes, where filmy growths soften the stone, and where water percolates and drips darkly at right angles to the natural cleavage. Upon ledges and in crannies much life finds foothold, and the cliff-face is draped with ferns and grasses, with trailing hypericums, stray heather mats and silvery, young, springing saplings of willow and of birch.

Over the quarry's edge fell brake-fern, that burnt like a russet aureole at this season; a rowan, with

scarlet fruit still clinging, stood there also, and oak trees crowded stoutly round about. Here ran a pathway through the wood, and it was protected by a rail at that point where it crossed the head of the quarry. Beneath, after a drop of sixty feet, broken débris shelved sharply and spread litter to the margin of a shallow pool where rushes, thistles, raspberry and black-berry briars grew together and the water glimmered widely all stained to redness by the rust of iron-stone.

The broad eastern face of the quarry dropped sheer from an over-hanging forehead of scrub oak, and upon its planes the dawn found many rare colours. Like a place of jewels the rocks glowed for a brief moment at sunrise, then their glories passed and the precipice subsided into shadow by day, and faded by gradual transitions through gloaming into the formless vast of night.

Here, amid the oak trees, where dying foliage rustled, and the low and lemon light of evening stole through implication of many leaves, did Salome meet young Redvers and smile upon him.

"I'm right weary," she said; "'tis a terrible stickle path home this way."

He took her basket and proposed that they should rest awhile, but hardly hoped that she would consent to do so.

"Ess, I will then — so long as you please," she answered to his delight.

"Let's get over the fence into the deep fern above the quarry. Us'll be so snug as seven-sleepers<sup>1</sup> there, an' out of sight an' earshot."

She followed him and presently they sat together where the red bracken rose above their heads and silence brooded.

<sup>1</sup> *Seven-sleepers* — Dormice.

"You'm always tired the days you go to Ashbury. Why for don't you ax me to go sometimes? I'm lazy now till the new year. Doctor bids me do light work an' run no risk of a wet jacket till Spring be come again."

"You're so kind, Jesse; an' me not worth a thought of any man."

"Worth a thousand thoughts and a thousand lives, for that matter. I'd give you mine—oh, if you could—but 'tis cruel to keep wearying your ear with that. When I was sick I dreamed often I was your husband, an' sometimes that I was your footstool. I'd be that, an' happy to be that, if you could get happiness by trampling on me."

Knowing the thing that she was about to say, the woman permitted herself to dwell in thought upon the past. Old dear days and the music of them—vanished hours and the light and life and fire of them—rose again and touched her spirit. She seldom encouraged such images, for grief dwelt in their shadows and followed when they departed; yet these pictures from the past were the only good thing that memory treasured for Salome. Now, in the sunset light and with the knowledge that she was about to tell this boy a lie, she retraced her thoughts and wandered through haunted moments buried in years forlorn—through scented, sacred hours and secret days, that she would have promised her lonely soul to hell to have again.

"If you could but listen—if you could see even in a dream the love I've got for 'e."

"I know—I know. Such a determined man you are!"

Then her mind played a strange dual part as she heard him offer his love again and pray her to take him; she listened and answered coherently; relented

gently ; accepted him and bargained for a clear year of liberty. She filled his cup of joy to the brim and found herself in his arms ; but even while his hairy kisses were tingling on her cheek, something from the past burst its bounds, broke the lock of her soul, leapt to her lips and uttered itself in words. No power of will could restrain it. The thought bubbled like a spring out of her hidden heart ; and with her heart's blood was each word tinged—to the ear of any who had known. Jesse's arms were round her ; he was crying out that there was after all a God, and blessing Him with fervour, and praying for forgiveness in that he had doubted the Everlasting. Then she spoke with the voice of one who walks and who suffers in a dream.

"He called himself my old red fox ; but he wasn't a red man really."

"Who, who, my own darling Sally ? Somebody as'll make me jealous, I reckon, since you can name him in a moment like this !"

She looked at him and laughed her sad, soft, creamy laugh ; while she fought with an impulse to tell the truth and bid him be gone for ever.

"One as loved me once—long ago."

"But you didn't love him ?"

"Yes, I did. He's dead—like the flowers of the summers gone past. Us can call home the colour an' the scent by taking thought of 'em. An' so with the dead. 'Tis funny to you I should think of that dead man even in your live, loving arms ; but the shadows of dead folks always come to my mind just when I'm most alive myself."

"You'll have to tell me about him some day, Salome."

"I wonder."

"But you love me, only me now? I'm jealous even of that dead chap. He couldn't have died if he knowed you loved him—'twouldn't be possible. You only love me now, Salome my heart?"

"I love you. I love you for loving me so true an' steadfast—an' for yourself—an' your great patience—an' most of all for your great sorrow. What thin arms you've gotten! You'm a boy yet, I believe."

"Not I—a man in my love for you anyway. 'Tis illness have made me so poor. But a year—must it be that much? 'Tis a lifetime an' more."

"You'm greedy. Yes, a year—an' very like more'n a year."

"I can't believe it—'tis too great a thing to be true. I'm thinking I must be back among them dreams again. Yet none was so sweet an' lovely as this. To think as life's got joy in it yet—an' father gone—an' none but you could ever have brought happiness to me any more."

She did not answer. Then his presence, that pressed so close against her, grew to an outrage in her mind. She moved from him and told him to leave her.

"Never!" he said. "Never no more, my life's breath an' joy!"

"In honesty I want to be alone—now—now. I'm starving to be alone—here—this instant moment—to think. There's so much—so much more than you know."

"You'm happy—say you'm happy, Salome."

"I haven't been happier for long years. Do what I beg you, dear Jesse, an' go."

"If I must, I must, though 'tis like leaving a feast afore you've begun. Be very careful, sweet. The dark of evening be closing in so fast an' we'm only two yards from the quarry edge. Turn by this ash



tree when you come. I'll take your basket to the farm. Don't be long after me. May I tell 'em?"

"If you like."

"An' you? No—I can't go altogether, Sally. I'll stop for you at the stepping-stones. 'Tis tricky in the dimpsy light there."

"I shan't slip. Please don't come back, Jesse. I want to be all alone wi' the trees an' the fern. Even such a sweet bed as this—the last—oh, God, if I'd never rose from it—ghosts—ghosts—there, I be raving—go, I tell you! Why do you stare so? Go, or I'll call back my words to you. Don't you love me well enough to do my bidding? You'll be a poor husband if you can't. Come to-morrow, an' I'll have a million kisses for 'e, an' love, an' joys to make you dance an' sing. You don't know yet what 'tis to love a female. I'll teach 'e belike—if it don't frighten 'e to larn."

"Oh, Salome dear, — I ——"

"Go—go, for Christ's sake! If you bide another second I'll fling myself into the quarry!"

Half joyous, half fearful, and confronted for the first time with a glimpse of a woman's heart, the youth obeyed, left her sitting there, took her basket and went on up the valley. Fear and love struggled within him. He perceived that she suffered from great stress of emotion, but her state was not understood by him. He determined to stay near at hand, to pass along the road that she must follow and wait in the gathering darkness until she overtook him. Then, seeing that she did not come, he turned and walked half-way back towards the quarry. Next he changed his mind again and hurried with all his speed to Watchett Hill that he might announce the news.

Elsewhere, as night, like a lover, stole into those

silent woods and draped the planes of the naked stones with darkness, Salome's heart returned slowly to a sort of helpless peace. She had writhed under the physical touch of the lad's embraces, for they wakened memory to madness — the memory of a grown man's love, with its spring-time and glory of passion. Her bosom throbbed and a great, heart-deep, heart-killing sigh rose into the air. She flung herself down and lay motionless with the smell of the dead fern in her nostrils; while like an echo, like an afterglow, like the phantom radiance of a mock sun, this worship from a virgin boy called back the ripe fervour and flame of a grown man's adoration. In its humility and abundant joy Jesse's passion brought close the buried hours; and yet the least memory of them had more throb and pulse and red blood in it than all this affection of a living lad. As water to wine were these contrasted devotions. The other had been humbler, deeper, stronger; he had stripped his soul to her, taken her into his very heart's core, trusted her with his salvation. His love had devoured her again and again, feasted on her breath, burnt for her like a beacon fire through many a full and frenzied hour. It was inveterate and glorious. Its sudden loss had nearly killed her; had struck at the roots of her real life and left her dreaming, half unconscious in a world of shadows. With his death the sun had set for her and the savour of existence departed. She lived indifferently, like an unsentient thing, and she suffered dumb. Her joy she had hidden and, upon his passing, robbed and tortured nature rose to a far harder task and she concealed her grief also. None knew that Salome's heart went into eternal mourning when Anthony Redvers vanished, or that her life's vital warrant and excuse was buried with him.

No riper feeling than kindness — the kindness of the old for the young — could ever animate her mind towards the dead man's son. She knew that to mate with Jesse would be a deed darker than sacrilege, an abomination, a treason to the dead and an outrage upon her own widowed soul. She never dreamed of wedding him, yet suffered this understanding to be established between them, and cared nothing for the cruelty of it, since such a plan might perchance serve to lessen her father's tribulations. As to what would follow, or what catastrophe was likely to spring from that day's deed, she cared nothing. One fact alone stared out certain amid the desolate unrealities of life; to her marriage with any man was impossible.

She rose at last and went her way. Darkness had enfolded the forest and only westward, amid stems and branches interlaced, a spent gleam of day's red fire flickered lingeringly. Halstock slept, and the smell of the earth's breathing was the smell of death, where the woman's feet moved amid fallen leaves and broke the soft shapes of fleshy, hooded things, that sprang unseen in the colours of sorrow. Aloft an infinite purity of moist air brought close the stars, so that, like dew-drops, they sparkled upon the boughs of the trees. Salome went forward very slowly by a winding path that sank anon to water's edge. Here the river wanly glimmered as of yore, through the fringes of night. From the mystery of its shining foam arose a song; and the music that had set old-time joys to lyric movements, now throbbed a measure accordant with grief. She stood quite still there, pressed her small hands against her breast and looked up at the glittering kingdoms of heaven.

## Book III



## CHAPTER I

ANN ALONE

A RAINBOW hung in the stormy air of spring. The time was afternoon ; the bow stretched enormous, and framed Cosdon Beacon's bosom within its span of purple and emerald, gold and ruby. Upon a background of dark cloud the glory of it burnt like a column of jewels and simulated solidity ; but where the earth stood behind, the transparency of this liquid light was manifest, and the hills and valleys shone transformed through it. Heath and wild watercourses, bogs deep-fringed with the ashy death of last year's reeds, tattered thorns, lonely pathways and concourse of great stones — all showed lustrous behind the rainbow's misty veil. Ponies galloped beneath it, and cattle were also transfigured by the magic of the light. A heron rose at stream-side, and his wing gleamed for a moment. Then he passed from the radiant arc and vanished. The rainbow endured a long while, and before the last ghostly shadow of it had faded, a woman emerged out of the sobriety of the hill and descended into the valley beneath. Here rolled Taw at the foot of Cosdon, and the voyager crossed carefully ; then set her face to the last slopes of the Belstone hills and proceeded towards Harter Farm.

Again life throbbed in the heart of earth and the vernal time brought hourly answers to the sun's awakening power. The frailest blade this woman's feet de-

pressed rose again slowly, lifted up its head and went on living and growing after she had passed. She alone moved hopeless under the ancient halo and symbol of hope; she alone of all things that the rain fell upon and the sunshine blessed, endured her days indifferent to the oncoming of another year. For her the Spring brought neither bud nor blossom; the Summer furnished no pageant powerful to uplift her heart. Autumn's garners were sterile for her, and Winter's steely self a spirit more congenial, since its processions of darkness and of death chimed best with her life's present and her soul's future.

Two caravans stood in a sand-pit on the east side of Cosdon Beacon, and Mrs. Redvers was now returning home from them. A gipsy's wife had borne a baby there, and the mistress of Harter, hearing of the matter, helped the young mother and drew the attention of the Church to this advent. That day the child had been baptized.

As for her own existence now, Ann moved through it like an embodied grief, and stood for a state of sustained but passive suffering. So from the twilight of pagan drama those Titan figures of tragedy gaze upon us, each with the face and voice of a different agony. The genius that drew their immortal desolation and left them more enduring than the kingdoms of earth, had been needed to paint this woman aright.

Ann's life held no human friction to ruffle, to smooth, or to sweeten it. Her visible existence was automatic and mechanical. Day passed to night and night dissolved into day without bringing a new thing. She was removed from her kind as the dead are removed from it; and as one may read without emotion a history of those who are dust, or conceive with serenity of lives unborn, so now she looked out upon the world and its

progress. Between her and human kind a veil was drawn—transparent but impassable. She moved among men and women like a ghost; and even as some benignant spectre might yearn to benefit the living, yet fail for lack of the essential medium of matter, so now Ann, in whom had arisen a humble but earnest longing to befriend such as cried for friends, while desirous to do good, found it difficult. This happened because she could not estimate the difference between her standpoint and that of those about her. No tribulation that overtook the people loomed large enough in her eyes for more than regret. All that the folk endured seemed dwarfed to a level impotence and nothingness when beheld from her pinnacle of torment. The misery of human hearts was a mere froth on life's flood contrasted with the tragedy of lost souls. These suffering, aching men and women all had Heaven as a stout probability; and in the light of that hope, the stress of the few earthly years and cares seemed scarcely a matter for pity in Ann. So an angel for ever fallen might regard, with envy rather than commiseration, the mental tortures of a saint, or the fleeting, physical anguish of a martyr.

Battle had been a blessing and amelioration for her; conflict had perhaps shaken her from this frozen woe; but conflict there was none. No ray of light played upon her days; no incident was great enough to rouse her from a passionless self-absorption. The springs of life were not sapped. Her superb body knew no physical pang; her hair grew grey slowly; but upon the tablets of her countenance darkness brooded and solemnity had made a home. Only children possessed power to bring gentleness and a shadow of smiling upon her face. To the babies she yielded the debt and tribute that all humanity accords to them. It is



the implicit compliment paid by the living to Nature before evidence that life is still prosperous, still conquering, still mistress of the earth ; for even the least joyous shall be seen to indicate pleasure before the spectacle of little ones, and lambs, and the fledglings in the nest.

Ann Redvers waited for doom patiently. Often her eyes rested on Michael, and in her prayers she daily blessed him, while faith told her that from the last hope of salvation he had cut her off. She had given the fruit of her body for the sin of her soul. Those identical words she often read and pondered in the Prophets. Her destiny was determined, the blazon of her days written, and the verdict of the Almighty recorded. She considered the wombs that had borne murderers and marvelled as to how many round-eyed babies, that day milking their mothers, would presently do as she had done. God waited and watched them gather strength enough and sin enough to play their parts. She, too, had been moulded upon that awful wheel ; her parents had met and loved to this end. But still she prayed, as the caged lark sings of liberty it will never know again ; still she poured out burning prayers ; and her outward demeanour was softer than of old ; and she strove to feel and display compassion for the little frets and griefs of other lives.

The doom of the children was dreadful to her. How many were called to suffer on earth ; how few admitted to the joy eternal of Heaven. As one not chosen, she longed to increase the number of those who should be, yet knew her ambition vain. Like others of her creed, she embraced the dogma of free will as a vital bulwark of religion, yet rested her intellectual life on a predestination as remorseless and irrevocable as ever reason taught. The happiness of the children, while yet they could be happy, was often in

her thoughts, and she strove to advance it. But the little things shunned her and did not understand that she loved them. They sidled away from her straight, black figure, and hid their faces in their mothers' aprons. They felt more of her darkness than adults did.

For a space, the things that she did and said were nought, only the things that she resolved in the isolation of her heart. Her convictions and sufferings bore their fruit. They developed her resources and moulded her being for the final ordeals of existence that now approached. Chance ordered it that upon the climax and culmination of another life her fortune turned. She had probed tribulation too deeply, she was plunged too terribly in darkness, to escape therefrom by light of any trivial taper. Her ruined soul cried for sacrifice, and since it seemed that the divine mediator of her religion stood powerless to save her at this pass, destiny furnished another victim. It was not Christ who summoned her dead hope from the grave and breathed the breath of life into it; it was not the Son of Man out of His strength, but the son of her own body in his weakness who worked that miracle.

The rainbow died, and after its magic sleight, Dartmoor again lowered stern and dark in the familiar colours of truth. As Ann passed onward, her dress and bonnet now stood out sharply against grey and green, now merged into gloom, where swaling fires had bitten patches of blackness upon the heath. Her eyes looked steadfastly ahead, and there came gentleness into them. For a moment she had forgotten herself and the inner and outer life. Her mind was engaged upon a tiny matter. She pressed her fingers into the palms of her hands to remind her sense of touch and bring back again the sensation of the little, new-born fingers that she had lately held and set her cheek against.

## CHAPTER II

### WRONG THEORIES

**T**HERE came a Sunday when the green slopes about Belstone village were musical with the cry of young life, when the lambs played and bleated, when the cuckoo called from many a misty glade and the church bells crowned the melody of the morning with wind-borne cadences. They throbbed and lulled, broke out harmoniously together, set the sweet air stirring, then sank as the organ woke beneath them. A murmur of prayer and song hung round the church and filtered beyond the gravestones. Now music rolled again, now a single old voice threaded the silence with lesson and sermon. Anon the folk returned to their homes. They issued in an irregular and many-coloured stream from the porch, and the bravery of the women contrasted with the shiny blackness of the men. Then the tide of them broke and thinned away down this alley and that; the noise of them faded until their homes had received them all and the village lay deserted and silent.

Familiar figures moved upward together towards Watchett Hill. Joseph Westaway and Ann Redvers walked in front and discussed the engagement between their houses. The matter was old history now, but Jesse continued to sustain a lively interest in his betrothal, for he had insisted on spending no small part of his savings upon Salome. His gifts had taken the

form of paying debts at Watchett Hill Farm; yet, to the flock-master's surprise, this partial relief did not much modify his position, but served only to postpone the inevitable climax that now followed upon a long and hard winter.

"Such a good, generous chap—like his father before him, I'm sure. But not another penny shall he hand over to my girl. We've took enough, an' more'n enough for our comfort," declared Mr. Westaway.

"There's some people never do seem to have the knack of getting money's value; an' I'm afraid you're one of them," answered Ann. "You know right well if a hundred pounds, or even a thought more, would right you, I can let you have it, an' no hurry to return it either; but be that enough? I'm very much afraid it ban't."

"To be frank, things have now reached a crisis, or you might even say a climax," confessed the old man. "Yet hope rises up in me when I look at the lambs. Nature be that bountiful that 'tis a very poor compliment to Providence to be cast down, especially in spring-time. I must take it in a big spirit, as becomes a man who have had lordship over so many acres in his time."

"What be Barbara talking to William Arscott about?" asked Mrs. Redvers, looking back. "There! If she haven't turned back over the green with him!"

"I don't know, I'm sure," answered Barbara's father. "They girls do take so much upon themselves. 'Tis amazing how childer dictate to the older generation now-a-days. Us'll have to ax 'em for leave to breathe an' eat our victuals presently. But if I can't get Mr. Arscott to see sense, of course she

can't. Between you an' me, ma'am, I thought he was a much more gentlemanly fellow than he is. He was rude to me in the open street t'other evening. An' me old enough to be his father."

"But not wise enough," she answered. "You'm made of different stuff."

"I'm glad I be, for that matter."

"He's a man of business; an' Barbara's a woman of business, if ever woman was. I hope she'll find a way."

"A clever girl, God knows, an' better than a purse of gold in the house. Sometimes I cuss the men in my headstrong way for standing back from her. What a wife goes there! But I think you like t'other best?"

Ann's face grew mild at mention of Salome's name.

"Maybe 'tis natural that I should, since my son does. She's soft an' gentle — such sad eyes. Somehow my heartstrings have gone around her a little. She's not happy, farmer. She feels all this coil even more than you do, or Barbara, though 'tis little she says about it."

"I wish as Jesse wouldn't keep her away from the House of the Lord. 'Tis bad enough holding off himself, but why for he should lead her away, I don't know. 'Tis a great trouble, I assure 'e."

"Not less to me. I've spoke often. They be dead to it seemingly. I hope she'll soon name the day. They'd settle down after marriage, an' a child or two might draw 'em to worship, when they comed to think of what us owe our childer."

"I'll put it to her. I want for her to be married so much as anybody."

Mr. Westaway turned to Nathaniel Tapp, who now overtook them.

"Give you good morning, Nat," he said. "Glad to see you to church again. I thought as you'd left us for good."

"Not me," answered the head man of Harter; "you'll never catch me putting all my eggs in one basket in matters of the soul, Joe Westaway. I'm all for freedom. Not that I trust parson — far from it. He didn't please me to-day, an' I won't pretend as he did."

"Dallybuttons! I never heard un to better purpose," answered the farmer. "So comforting an' warming, an' such a large patience with the backslider — like the long-suffering of God's self. For my part, I do specially love to see the man thump the Book as he does at a full stop here an' there. 'Tis just for all the world like we slap an old friend on the back; an' mind you, the Bible be his old familiar friend, else he'd not take the liberty. I wish I had the mastery of the Word that man hath."

"Very fine," said Mr. Tapp, "but I hate fog — whether 'tis up-along or in church. The man goeth in a mist, an' his landmarks fail him. Such a chap as he'm growing for loopholes! But you don't catch Jehovah making no loopholes — eh? Parson's getting to treat hell-fire as if 'twas a subject that didn't ought to be named in mixed company. Whereas the truth of it be this: 'tis just the mixed company as'll end by going there. Ax Mrs. Redvers if I ban't right. Parson, an' me, an' you, an' another in an' out, be well enough, no doubt, for if a man's saved, his conscience tells him so in plain words, an' 'tis false modesty to pretend otherwise. But truth's truth; an' damnation's truth; an' parson knows it."

"You'm a hell-fire man, no doubt," admitted Mr. Westaway, "an' always have been ever since I met with you. But still, there's hope for all men."

"Ess, thank God, I am a hell-fire man; an' my mistress be a hell-fire woman; an' my wife likewise."

"As your wife naturally would be," said Mr. Westaway. "Still, there's rumours in the air that hell don't always mean hell. So parson said awhile ago."

"What the word means be God's business, not ours," answered Nathaniel angrily. "Was He going to sit by an' see the saints turn His Word into wrong English? A likely story! I've no patience with such mean ideas. Do 'e know the last verse but two in the Bible, flock-master?"

"No doubt I do, but not off Book, Nat."

"Well, they'm about as clear as John could make 'em. 'An' if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life an' out of the holy city.' That's English; an' that's what be going to happen with them that say hell don't mean hell."

Jesse Redvers and Salome had met their elders a few moments before this utterance. From a long ramble they came, and Tapp's last word interested the youth not a little, for it reminded him of the things spoken long since by the stranger fisherman. Tapp in his own phrase actually echoed the other.

Ages of experience had passed over Jesse's mind since the autumnal storm on Steeperton. His engagement went far in its first glory to bring him rest and contentment; but now the novelty had passed and he hungered for realisation. Salome, however, evaded the event and reminded him that she had bargained for a full year of freedom. Long since she had repented of her lying pretence; more than once she came near confessing it to him and begging his forgiveness and her liberty. Still she delayed. A pity for the man had awakened in her, and a frank admiration for his mother.

Some affinity drew the miserable girl and the forlorn woman together. Without words each understood that the other was sorrowing; but since the secrets of both lay deeper than utterance, each formed a wrong impression and maintained a false theory concerning the other's grief. Ann supposed that her future daughter went sadly before the approaching downfall at Watchett Hill; Salome imagined that Mrs. Redvers still mourned for her husband's death, still found herself unable to forget, or to order her life with resignation now that he had passed from it.

To speak the truth never occurred to Salome, even in her most despondent moments. She could conceive no circumstance capable of bringing that to her lips. Yet, upon the question of the engagement with Jesse, she found herself not seldom in a mood to take the man's mother into her confidence and explain that she neither desired nor deserved to marry him. Sometimes she determined to tell her lover; sometimes she promised herself that Ann should first hear it. Then she thought of disappearing and leaving a letter behind her for Jesse, or a message with Barbara. She was not, however, all coward. Barbara at least would never be tormented with her affairs.

Indeed, Barbara had her own problems, and now they pressed heavily upon her. Salome knew very well why her sister had stopped at Belstone with Mr. Arscott when Nathaniel Tapp mentioned the fact to her. She was aware that at that moment Barbara sat in the stone-dealer's parlour and discussed a subject infinitely delicate and infinitely painful. She had prayed her elder to do no such thing; by her importunities and tears she had delayed the tragedy; but now it was actually happening, for to Barbara the necessity gradually grew into a duty, and, resolute to



save her father from ruin, she faced it. Salvation lay through William Arscott alone. Other creditors showed an inclination to be reasonable and patient; but his patience had ended. He was very busy and not very happy. His own schemes cried for money and he wanted it. Mr. Westaway was a sound investment, but he had now matured and there was nothing more to do than claim his policy of life insurance.

The party walked together awhile, then Mr. Westaway with the boy, Paul Lethbridge, turned homeward to Watchett Hill, while Mr. Tapp and his mistress, with Jesse and Salome, proceeded towards Harter. It was a rule that the girl dined with Jesse's family on Sunday, and not seldom her sister and father did the same. Their little world smiled upon this betrothal, but all agreed that further postponement of marriage was an idle whim upon Salome's part.

Now Jesse, very willing to escape from Nathaniel Tapp, walked forward and discussed his own affairs with his sweetheart.

The relation between these two displayed a surface intimacy and an implicit closeness that deceived Jesse from the outset. He knew nothing of women, and believed that Salome had no secret from him. He supposed that he understood her very mood and could comprehend the least shadow of meaning conveyed by touch or glance. He knew as he entered her presence whether she was happy or sad. It was enough that he stood beside her to comprehend. Truth indeed compelled him to confess that she was more often sad than happy; but that he attempted to explain in a manner satisfactory to his mind. He perceived that her nature remained dejected, and supposed that the condition of sadness was inherent to it. He liked her none the less, for was not he himself a melancholy man? But while

circumstance had driven him upon gloom and blocked all corridors and aisles to happiness, in her case there was nothing save her father's trouble to explain this affinity with things mournful. Hoping therefore that Mr. Westaway's cares might be responsible for all, Jesse did what he could to lessen them, and strained his own resources in the attempt. His efforts won her thanks and gratitude, but nothing more. There remained the unexplained darkness and he could not dissolve the cloud. She failed not in a temperate display of regard; but his own hot heart and healthy physical longing for her found no response and woke no echo. Her kiss was like a sister's; her address in turning the conversation from things close and personal never deserted her.

Casting about to seek a further explanation, Jesse Redvers found his heart directing and his private personal desire misleading him. He did not understand this emotion and supposed that it proceeded from the head. Briefly he began to suspect that so long as the tragic secret of his own life was concealed, no unity of soul could ever really exist between his future wife and himself. She hid nothing from him; but from her he kept the most tremendous experience of his life. He vainly fancied that she was awake to his reserve and that it pained her.

First he told himself that a shadow must lie between them for evermore as a result of this necessity, and that he must face this further trial added to existence; then the alternative haunted him; the strong personal yearning to share his knowledge returned again and again with increased powers of temptation. Justice, his promise, and his brother, were thoughts that prompted him to fly from such a disclosure; but there was another aspect of the relations obtaining that drew

him back again. He remembered that Salome Westaway had said how she loved Ann, that she had declared there was no woman who better understood and more closely sympathised with Mrs. Redvers than did she. What added strength might come to his suffering mother from such a sympathy! Yet, against that, how if the truth should turn Salome from Ann for ever, and also turn her from Jesse himself? Who would blame a woman for refusing to marry the son of a murderess?

Hereon new problems woke and he began much to doubt whether he was justified in withholding the secret. He remembered that his mother had urged him to tell it; but he suspected her motives at the time and supposed that she only proposed the course in order that the knowledge of her sin should leak into the world despite her sons. Ranging over the aspects of this problem, Jesse's soul sank into new darkness. Meantime his personal bent—steady, obstinate, unsleeping—worked at him and wore him down by imperceptible attrition. It found a thousand cogent reasons why he should bare his heart and make Salome his confidante. Only sometimes in the morning, when he woke with a mind refreshed, did this thought look unattractive and even repugnant. If he was weary, or particularly unhappy, it called him with trumpet tongue to share and so to halve his load. Sometimes he believed the inclination to be conscience, and sometimes, nature. He deluded himself and when voices from the unseen cried cowardice, he answered that the cowardice lay in silence. This woman had given him all and he had only given her part. Moreover she knew that he hid something. Doubtless it was this uneasy knowledge that explained the shadow still dwelling between her and him. He determined to convince himself if it was so.

To-day he designed to ask plainly whether she held him in any blame; but up to the present time Salome had proved in no mood for conversation. Her thoughts were full of her sister and she was much preoccupied and distracted.

After dinner at Harter the girl sat with Ann Redvers, and when Jesse came to find her for their walk, he discovered that she had gone out upon the Moor with his mother. He started to join them and presently descried them far off in the valley of Oke. Then, suddenly, he lost heart about approaching them at that time, and turned away and sat and smoked alone on the Belstones in a hollow of Higher Tor, where none could see him or find him.

## CHAPTER III

### BARBARA OFFERS HERSELF

**W**HEN Barbara followed William Arscott into his house, he went first and did not hold the door for her. His attitude was one of indifference, for he little doubted that she had come to beg.

Into the frosty parlour they went, and the oleographs glittered with that atmosphere of the east wind peculiarly their own, while the old, faint smell of upholstery still hung in the room.

Barbara took off her thread gloves, plunged down for a pocket-handkerchief, dabbed her forehead with it and sat in the chair he placed for her. He himself occupied an armchair opposite and reclined with his back to the window.

"Yes," he said, watching her roaming eyes; "the damp's more in the looking-glass than ever. A bad bargain that. What can I do for you?"

"Mr. Arscott," she began, and he stopped her.

"Call me 'William,'" he said. "All Belstone speaks of me as 'busy Billy' behind my back. But 'tis always 'mister' to my face. As between friends I like the Christian name — easy an' pleasant."

With secret thanksgiving she took advantage of this excellent opening.

"So I will then, an' glad to, I'm sure. 'Tis your good fortune an' success makes people so civil. All folks know the manner of man you are. Faither has held ever you was just in your dealings."

"That's no news. Let him as have caught me in a crooked trick prove it. As to your old man——"

"Leave him for a minute," she answered. "I've come about something different."

"So much the better, Barbara. I don't like business on Sunday; but since it ban't that, I'll be easy."

"It is business in a sort of way—an' yet—us can't call it so ezacally. In fact, 'tis a mortal difficult job for a female, William, an' I hope you'll bear with me."

"Take your time. You'm flustered an' a thought too warm seemingly. I'll ope the window. 'Twill let in air an' blow this stink o' the shop out. A curious thing how the smell sticks."

He turned and opened the window. It yielded with difficulty, because no hand had lifted the sash for five years.

"If you'll look t'other way, or pick up thicky volume of photographs, so as to keep your eyes off me while I talk, I'll thank you," said Barbara. "I've come to say a very unusual thing, an' your eyes make it harder."

He laughed, turned to an old album on the table and flung it open.

"Be blessed if the mildew ban't crept in here too!" he exclaimed. "Just look to this here photograph of my brother Thomas. 'Twas taken the day afore we buried him. Spoilt now—a pity that. Well, speak your speech. I'll stare out of window. No need to be feared o' me. Just call home what I said to 'e a dozen years ago. You know what I thought of 'e then. A feeling like that—even after it have long faded away—do leave something. If there's any as I'd listen to with patience, an' even a bias, 'tis you—so long as you keep off money."

"Thank you, William. But it wasn't twelve year

ago — just a bare thought more'n ten, come to add it up. An' you'm a man the years pass over like the mist passes over the Moor. They never leave a mark."

The compliment pleased him.

"That's the truth, I do believe: I wear mighty well despite the frets an' cares of life. I take care of myself, mind you, and Nature loves them as love themselves without a doubt. I'm younger than my age by many a good year, and I don't feel it."

"An' don't look it," declared Barbara, scorning herself for the word.

The subject interested Mr. Arscott. He rose and regarded himself in his looking-glass.

"A bit of grey in the red of my eyebrows, certainly; and 'tis strengthening over the ears; but my hair's so thick as thatch still; and I can go my twenty mile afoot; and my hand-grip be just as hard as ever, I believe. When I was at the tooth-drawer's to Exeter a month back, he praised me. 'Never seen a better lot of grinders in a man of your age,' said he. All good signs — eh?"

"All very good signs indeed," answered Barbara. "You've kept that young in body that the puzzle is why you've growed so much older in heart."

"I haven't — don't you think it. I'm a big-hearted man in my way, and a damned sight more sap and spirit in me than anybody has any idea of. But I don't wear my heart on my sleeve like some of us."

"In the matter of marriage you've always hung back, however," she said.

He did not immediately answer, but wondered how much Barbara knew. Since his proposal to Mrs. Redvers, the stone-merchant had not again made effort to win a wife.

"No," he answered shortly. "Such good things ban't for me."

"'Tis a pity nevertheless. You'd be a strong rock for a woman in time of trouble; an' they've their uses about a house. To think as you'm up fifty year old an' have never knowed the meaning of comfort!"

He looked at her and formed a mental picture of her in the past, when he had proposed without success. The time had left sharp marks, for care and thought and sorrow were all busy scribbling on Barbara's face. She was thinner too and her voice had grown more shrill. Still he admired her character and remembered what Ann Redvers had said concerning an ideal for him.

"I must be content to bide a bachelor. There's that in me turns the women away. But I'm sorry for it. If I knowed what 'twas, I'd have it out."

"You ban't against marriage as a general thing?"

"Of course not. The world must go on. Didn't I ax you to marry me?"

"We all make mistakes," said Barbara. Her heart stood still after she had spoken. But there was a brief respite: he misunderstood her.

"Well, well. I did — I grant it. Still, you might have done worse, and nobody knows that better than you."

She hesitated a moment, then plunged.

"I didn't mean that. I meant as I might have made the mistake in refusing — not you in axing."

A silence that seemed to stretch over years followed upon her explanation. Barbara took deep gasps of air, and felt her face burn as though flames were licking it. Arscott, having measured the force of this utterance, whistled, rose slowly from his chair and began to walk about the room. He made no other answer.



Unseen by her, his scrutiny was renewed with tenfold closeness. His little eyes took in every detail. From behind her he regarded the hair under her hat. He noticed that the wisp of it was very neat, but smaller than of yore. He could not satisfy himself whether it was the light or a touch of grey that brightened it. To the seams in the back of her old Sunday gown he studied her; then he regarded her contours and the red hand that drummed upon the table.

"Speak!" she said at last with a voice that choked. "For God's sake, don't walk about like that behind me. I can feel your eyes in my back."

"Take an easier chair and don't get excited," he answered. "'Tis for me to grow warm, not you. This you've said — do 'e see all that hangs to it?"

"Go on," she answered.

He sat down in his armchair again and began to pick his teeth.

"Ban't leap-year neither, you know," he added with a wink.

Barbara made a great effort and defined her view.

"I've said it, though it cost more than any male could ever know or dream. I've said that I was wrong not to marry you, William. An' that's what I comed to say, if you please."

"You are sorry that you said 'no'?"

She nodded.

"That's as much as to admit that if you had the chance to answer different, you would, Barbara."

She nodded again feebly.

"Well, well! What a day may bring forth! And me just beginning to have a thought for Powlesland's widow at the tobacco shop in Okehampton."

"I didn't know that."

"Of course not — more do she."

"I'd better go now."

She rose in haste, thankful to Providence for sending the widow Powlesland, as Jehovah aforetime sent the ram to the thicket. But William Arscott had come to no conclusion.

"Sit down," he said. "I must ax you to bide a bit on this. It calls for thought. 'Tis a very startling affair for a woman to propose marriage to a man. Pardon the word, but that's the English of what you've done. It don't happen to many men, and I'm a bit flustered accordingly. I'll go further and say as I'm flattered too. 'Tis a great compliment — if you speak from the heart."

As he uttered these words his eyes seemed to search in her heart and find it empty of him.

"But I'm afraid, after all, it ban't any high opinion of me brings you on your knees — eh?"

"I should be a pretty good wife for the likes of you. I've long larned to make twopence do the work of six — if that's anything."

"The craft of you females! 'That anything'? By God, it's everything! You know right well if you comed to me with a character from the bench of Bishops, you couldn't bring one as would please me better."

"'Tis true anyway."

"I believe it. That's why I want to think afore I speak. How many women know the power in a penny? How many understand a farthing? Yet a farthing is a good working bit of copper. In foreign lands they split a penny into ten, I'm told."

She did not answer; but her mouth worked, her eyes blinked swiftly and he perceived that she approached the region of tears.

"I won't keep you on the stretch more than I can

help," he said; "but you've had time to think about this; I haven't. You must let me argue it through and see how it sounds. There's fors and againsts. Us mustn't forget our duty to ourselves."

"You'm not likely to do that."

"I hope not. Still, the wisest of us may be surprised into foolishness. What living man hasn't got his weak moments? 'Tis like this: you can't in reason expect me to jump at you, Barbara. 'Tisn't human nature that I should. Ten years be ten years; though no ten years hit a maiden woman lighter than them between thirty an' forty—to say it in general terms. But you mustn't blame me for looking all round the bargain you offer."

"No, I don't blame you. I'd feel easier if you did do so."

He obeyed literally. He rose again and wandered about the room. While pretending to set straight a book or a picture, he again regarded her outward form with a keen and critical attention.

"The wisdom in our heads is often won at the expense of our bodies," he said. "As a rule the ugly, furrowed, time-stained souls be wiser than the handsome ones. Look at me. I've got ten wrinkles to your father's one. A woman's face and figure be delicate subjects for a bachelor's tongue; yet truth's truth; and the truth is that you are not what you were ten years ago. Thinner round the bosom, to be plain without rudeness, and flatter in the cheek, and the colour not so high."

She lifted her hands to her breast, as though to shield it; and her colour belied his criticism, for she blushed brick-red.

"I've been hungry more'n once since those years," she answered with dignity.

"To my grief I know it. How I do wish that your father had been a different stamp of man. But that's idle. Anyway you don't take after him. You're healthy, and hard, and good-tempered, and better looking yet than half the girls. Then, for the rest, 'tis all on the credit side, I'm sure, for I very well know what a manager you are. Also a towser for work. You've done wonders in your time without a doubt. I respect you, and respect wears better than love; for respect be built on reason, but love's no more than a question of temperature. So — to cut it short — if you'll have me, Barbara Westaway, I'm your man. And you'll never feel sorry, so long as you keep your sense."

She could not answer immediately. His pitiless criticism had tortured her; but it had opened the door to hope, and she endured it with throbbing pulses, because she believed that he would make an end by declining her. To be accepted was a terrible surprise. Her head swam and she feared that she was going to faint. At last she summoned strength and spoke, but for a moment evaded the main question.

"You know how we are placed. My dear father is in a gert deal of trouble along of treating people different to how they treat him. An' he's got nobody to trust to but me an' sister."

Arscott's lips hardened until a line, thin as the stamp of a chisel edge on oak, stood for his mouth.

"'Nobody to trust to'! And you — a Christian woman — can say that! But you be right all the same. Providence don't look after the fools. They want it; but, instead, 'tis me and such as me be looked after — the sort that can very well look after themselves. A strange thing that, if you think of it in a religious spirit. Who was it as never saw the righteous

man begging his bread? He can't have looked far. But don't let us mix pleasure and business. For 'tis a pleasure to think of marrying you. I'm hard, but I've got my soft spots. Trust a woman so clever as you to find 'em."

He suddenly broke off and uttered one of his rare, brief laughs.

"I'm smiling to think of old mother Lane, as have mended and cooked for me since father died. She'll rub her eyes when she hears that she've got to go! Us won't have no servants poking an' prying in the house. Give me a kiss, Barbara. There — be blessed if I shan't fall in love with you again presently when I get used to the strangeness."

She nerved herself to the ordeal and touched his cheek with her lips; then he returned the salute.

"And you'll be good to dear faither, won't 'e, William?" she asked, her voice again trembling towards tears.

He showed immediate irritation.

"'Tis indecent dragging him in afore my kiss be dry on your face. You ought to know better. West-away is neither here nor there. I'll promise no nonsense. He've got to suffer for fifty years of silliness, and I'm not going to lose hard-earned money by him or any other man. You'd best to understand that afore we go on. He's owing above a thousand pound — more than half to me. When he's cleared hisself, and got out of Watchett Hill, and handed over his life insurance to me, and settled in a cottage somewhere out of harm's way, I'll act as a son-in-law should. But I'm not going to do anything out of a story-book for him, so please don't think it."

"You won't let my marrying you make no difference to my parent then?"

"Only this : that I'll take you off his hands. Since you make it pure business, business be it. I want you for a wife, and I'd be lucky to get you ; but I ban't going to put down fancy money for you. I ban't going to pay the debts of the world for you. A clear thousand and more he needs ; and if I found it and throwed up my claim to the policy—lawfully mine now—I should have dropped a long sight more money for you, my dear, than you be worth—to me. Some might do it for you, no doubt. Find 'em. I wouldn't presume to put a price on a woman. But I never yet paid more for anything than left my margin of profits ; and I ban't going to begin to-day. You'm just worth yourself in my market. So there's my view of business in exchange for yours."

"You won't even forego his life insurance if I take you ?"

"No, I will not."

"Very well," said Barbara, rising and opening her chest with a deep breath. "Then hear me. I comed to you, like the daft fool I was, because I thought that now as you were up in years an' growing lonely an' grey, you'd begin to feel that a strong, thrifty woman might be a comfort. I came to make a bargain ; an' I be very well paid for my trouble. I don't deserve to escape, but I have. You'm not flesh and blood. You'm harder than the moor-stone you work in. That do let the moss live on it, but you—I pity the poor, mad woman who ever thinks to be the moss on your heart. A spider, with a cruel man's brain in its head—that's what you be ! You meant to ruin my father when you lent him that money ; you planned an' plotted for it—there—I could tear your ugly rat's eyes out of your face for this work ! You—you—a mullygrubs as only sees by the shine of money—

you to dare to refuse a woman like me ! Thank God you have ! ”

She gasped and hesitated.

“ Go on,” he said, and she obeyed.

“ There’s Providence enough working yet, though you do sneer at it. It ban’t sleeping, as you’ll find when you get on a bit an’ come to want more than money can buy. You flinty, insulting dog ! ‘ Thinner in the bosom,’ be I ? A mouse don’t know what life means till she’ve slipped out from under the cat’s paw. But I’ve escaped, an’ you’ve showed me a glimpse of the dirtiest, hatefulest little beastly soul as ever hid in a man’s ribs. Now I see ’tis true what all decent folks do say of you — true as gospel. You’m not a man ; you’m just a nasty, greedy imp sent to torment human creatures, and devour widows’ houses, an’ screw down the poor, like rheumatism screws their bones. You’m a blight — a curse to all that your shadow falls upon. If I had my way, I’d send you across the kingdom at a cart’s tail — an’ — an’ —— ”

She stopped for breath and panted with her hands upon the back of a chair.

“ Don’t shake the furniture,” he said calmly. “ That chair wasn’t built to put the stops to a speech by a woman in a passion. But go on — go on — get it all out. You haven’t done yet, I’m sure. Just show me what I’ve missed, there’s a good soul. I always like for an angry man to convince hisself he’s making a fool of hisself ; and if I let him talk long enough, he’ll generally end by doing it. As to women — that’s different ; still, you’ve got sense enough behind your temper. I could show you in half a minute you are wickedly wrong ; but I’d rather you showed yourself.”

“ I’ve done,” she said, “ an’ not a syllable will I call

back. I haven't got the words to say what you are or what I think of you. But your hour will come. A miser be a filthy thing, and they makes a filthy end most times. An' never you speak to me again, or to my faither."

"Well, that's easy. Thank you for sauce to my Sunday dinner, Barbara Westaway. 'Tis a great escape, to be sure. Such a coarse mind as you've got — without sense of right or justice therein. Better see the edge of a woman's tongue afore you'm married to her, than afterwards, when you've got the ugly task to blunt it."

Barbara did not answer, but left the room and the house. He followed to the door; then went down the path and opened the gate.

"I don't do this for civility," he explained, "but only for fear you might slam it."

She passed through and hastened up the hill, while he stood and watched her out of sight.

"What double-edged devils they be!" he reflected. "To think as I might have gone to matrimony with that virago if I'd been a simpler sort of man. Well, I've got my lesson. 'Tis lucky this came before I'd gone any forwarder with John Powlesland's leavings. Never more will I hanker after 'em; never will I touch one of 'em; an' never shall they touch me — till they lay me out."



## CHAPTER IV

### A DECISION

ONLY to her sister did Mr. Westaway's elder daughter divulge particulars of the conversation with William Arscott, and Salome shared Barbara's thankfulness at a merciful escape. From that time one woman became despondent and the other indifferent. Salome's own problems weighed heavily, and the pressing necessity to break from Jesse Redvers and deceive him no more, brought pain and shame upon her. She began to perceive the meanness and cruelty of the thing she had done; and even the hoped-for end was not attained, since Jesse's help — though generous as his means would bear — had only prolonged the losing struggle at Watchett Hill. Young Redvers made considerable payments of over-due interest to the granite merchant, and, upon the strength of them, offered suggestions to Arscott and proposed an arrangement. Whereon busy Billy, in his most direct manner, invited the other to mind his own business. That, he believed, was driving cattle off the artillery ranges and not finance. Galled by this insolence, the younger man grew hot and, in the quarrel that followed, put himself in the wrong. It was Arscott's philosophic method thus to fire his opponents to fury and then, under their rage, appear as a long-suffering and ill-used soul.

Jesse could do no more, and Salome knew it. Her instinct was towards swift departure, and both she and

Barbara now desired their father to take leave of Watchett Hill before he was driven from it. For her own part Salome determined to end her lover's dream, then disappear, and hide for ever from his reproach.

It remained to convince Joseph Westaway that he must go, and upon an afternoon in middle Spring his daughters set themselves seriously to do so. Nothing had happened to retard the unprosperous trend of affairs, and each month promised to make final settlement more impossible.

"Light your pipe, faither, an' come in the garden," said Barbara. "The place is empty, for Mrs. Haycraft has gone to Belstone an' Paul Lethbridge went with her."

Old Westaway hesitated.

"I never like that tone of voice, my dear; but I'll be there in a minute. Have 'e marked the vegetables? An' seldom did I see braver oats than them us shall have up-along this year."

"Yes," she answered. "Cabbages be more plentier this Spring; but the peas is cruel backward. Best put on your muffler. The wind blows cold."

Presently he came, lighted his pipe and sat down not far from an old straw bee-butt on the sunny side of the house. Bees were going and coming in hundreds swiftly, and their little bodies wove a pattern on the blue air—a flashing network that rose from the hive into the sky. The returning host settled slowly and some, heavily burdened, missed the alighting board and rolled in the grass beneath it. There they crawled and rested a little, then mounted and entered the hive. But those that streamed out from it, shot straight into the air and went about their business as swiftly as though propelled by some invisible force far stronger than any stroke of insect wings.

"Now, my dear," asked Barbara, "when be you going to face this evil like a man an' go out of here?"

"There's a question! As to this coil, 'tis only another name for life itself, an' I've been facing that like a man, I hope, ever since I comed to be a man. You can't see these things like the aged, Barbara, because you haven't lived long enough."

"Life ban't a matter of time, but feeling," she said wearily. "'Tisn't the years, 'tis what be crammed into 'em. Me an' Salome are older than you be."

"Poor maidens! what foolishness do come out of narrow thinking. If you could only see with my eyes. This very season the lambs have quite astonished me for all my experience. If I'd owned but enough ewes, our fortunes surely must have been made. Still, we hadn't ewes enough, an', to be honest, I think we must go."

"There's not a doubt as to that. If we don't go, we shall be took."

"Where land is the matter, a man must be leisurely and self-respecting. Nature teaches us to go slow. Of course in a sense, using the word in a far-reaching way, I'm broke. 'Tis a hard thing for a father to own to a child—still, God wills it, and I ban't the man to repine."

He puffed in silence, but his tobacco had gone out. The matches were on the bench beside him, and now Barbara struck one and held it to his pipe.

"You've got two women as worship every hair on your head, for all your trouble; though they ban't a very witty couple, worse luck," she said.

"I know I've got you an' Salome, an' never a prouder father. After all, you can't say I've failed ezacally. A deal of money have been through my

hands ; an' I've handled it in a big spirit an' let them as wasn't so rich an' prosperous have the crumbs."

" 'Crumbs' ! Yes ; an' crusts, an' half the loaf. 'Tis this way ; if we give up now, an' sell every stick we can do without, an' start in a small cottage somewheres, we can pay every penny — after a few years of saving. But, at the rate we'm going, 'tis bankruptcy and so much in the pound. That wouldn't suit you, I reckon ? "

" Dallybuttons ! No, Barbara — it would not. Twenty shillings go to a sovereign in the sight of an honest man. My mind's made up."

He raised his voice and called to Salome, who was putting sticks to a row of peas at the bottom of the garden.

" Sally ! Come here, will 'e ? Us be going ; us be going to leave Watchett Hill after all these years, Sally."

She came and sat down on the other side of him.

" 'Tis very good news to hear you say so, an' say it so strong, faither. You'm up in years now an' didn't ought to have the care an' fret of a big place no more."

He took her hand and patted it but made no answer. He was quick to see the love that had turned her speech thus gently.

Suddenly he burst out.

" But land I must have — I must have a bit of the earth, however little. Not much — not a farm — just a garden and a few rows of green stuff an' potatoes. An' a lean-to — one for a few beasts. A very few. An' perhaps a meadow — one small meadow. Surely — surely a man that's moved over hundreds of acres an' stood so high as me — surely one small meadow ? You wouldn't put me in a house in a row with nought but a back fence an' a rope to dry the washing on ? You wouldn't do that, Barbara ? "

"I want to keep you out of a house that's got a hundred windows an' no garden at all," she said drily.

"The Union workhouse? Well, well; but you mustn't let your low spirits run away with you. God Almighty's the great fact you'm so prone to overlook—you an' Salome too. Her I can understand, since to my grief she's turned her back on the Lord's House of late; but you—— An' as for the Union, when you call to mind the many I've helped to keep out of it—do 'e think 'tis all forgotten?"

"Yes, all," said Barbara. "The scores of silly, kind things you've done in your time be no more remembered now than last year's primrosen."

"Not by them as took my silver, perhaps; but the Lord's got a memory down to a cup of cold water."

"Us must find a cottage with a little lew garden for 'e," said Salome.

"An' a meadow—just a bit of grass for a sheep or two, an' perhaps—but there, how I run on! Have 'e thought where us should look for it, Barbara?"

"No," she answered. "We'll see how 'tis with us when we've squared up. The life policy goes to Arscott, so there's an end of that. Then there's all the other people. I'm afraid some must be axed to wait a little. But 'twill only be a matter of time for 'em."

"We'll have to begin again in a small way an' open out a bit afterwards," said her father. "An' don't you think I'm going to let the pinch fall on you girls. Far be it from me! I shall fling over baccy for one thing, and make one bottle of spirits go further than two have up till now. If it comed to a question between a bit of meadow an' gin an' water of a night, I'd let the drink go gladly."

"Will you step down an' see lawyer an' landlord to-morrow then?" asked Barbara.

"You young things! To-morrow! No, nor yet to-morrow week, my dear. There's times an' seasons for great, solemn changes; an' a man with lands and flocks and herds all looking to him for their meat — why, he ain't like a day labourer who can pay his week's rent an' take his worldly goods from one cottage to another in half a day."

"As to goods," declared Barbara, "the less you keep an' the more you sell off, the better for the future."

"There are times an' seasons," repeated Mr. West-away; "an' quarter day be one of the most favourable. Come twenty-fourth of June the deed will be done in a fitting way, and the world will gradually come to understand we are going."

"That's nearly seven weeks, an' money running all the time."

"Have no fear. I'm too fond of my fellow-creatures to let anybody suffer through me. I shall be remembered after I'm gone as a successful man, who knowed his business, an' brought up a small family with credit, an' had the ill-luck to lose his sons in infancy. Why, what's against me? Be it a shame to say of a man that he's a working Christian? If I gave the coat off my back, ban't I told to do it by my Master? Such things only don't come out right where the faith is weak. 'Tis the punishment for bad faith when us get left behind an' looks round for somebody to give us a coat when 'tis our turn to be old and cold; an' don't find 'em. There — I feel quite light-hearted again to think how we've smoothed away the future an' made it all so easy an' simple. Give me another light, Salome. Why, we've only got

to find a medium-sized place as looks south, an' so all's said."

At this moment the boy Paul Lethbridge suddenly burst upon them. He was red with running and they could hear him panting. He ignored the gate, but took a short cut over the hedge, where two of the wooden soldiers had been broken down and lay in the mud beneath.

"What do you mean, coming over there, you imp?" cried Barbara. "Ban't there a gate?"

"Sorry, miss," he gasped out; "but such news — such a calamity! I thought I'd do best to come quickest way."

She nodded.

"'Tis trouble's usual road, no doubt. What's happened? You'd best to blow a bit, or you'll bust."

"The — the granite quarry. They was using a bit of powder to blast out some big stuff, by all accounts. An' they reckoned all was clear, an' touched off the slow match, an' runned away. Then, who should suddenly come out from behind a rock not ten yards off the place but Joshua Bloom? He'd been busy at a bit of feather and tear work. They bawled to un to run for his life, an' he didn't know what 'twas all about for a minute. Then, when he caught their meaning an' beganned to hop off like a crow, 'twas too late, an' the airth blowed up to its bowels, an' a huge rock — some say above ten ton weight — caught Mr. Bloom in the small of his back and dropped un like a rabbit!"

"Dead? Don't tell me the poor soul be dead?"

"Oh no — not yet. I couldn't get very near him, but I wedged in the crowd an' heard a bit in an' out. Doctor comed, an' they carried him to his home, an' then I listened to Pearn an' Pierce an' a few others telling about it."

"Poor news — poor news," said Joseph Westaway. "An' them two old women, his sisters, beholden to the man for everything. Was he conscious?"

"Oh yes, master. Wide awake as could be — with a rolling eye. An' between the groans of hideous anguish, when they jolted him, he appeared to be very well pleased about it, because he said it made his dreams come true."

"What'll Arscott do, I wonder?"

"Fust thing he done was to send for a policeman an' have everybody drove away from the gate of Mr. Bloom's house. But us could hear beautiful from the back door, an' me an' a few other boys got round there over the wall an' listened to the man hollaring like a pig under the doctor's hands. Then I comed off to tell 'e. He wasn't dead when I left; that I'll swear to."

"I must look into this," declared old Westaway, rising. "'Tis no time to keep away from the man. He had his good points, if too bitter of speech. A Job of a man, without Job's large heart. An' the workhouse waiting, no doubt. I must go down."

"Better leave it till to-morrow," said Barbara; "they won't want no outsiders messing about now, you may be sure."

"'Tis the time to be an insider when a man's struck down like this," answered her father firmly. "If he's going to die, 'twill comfort him to know that I'll look after them two poor old sisters; an' if he's going to live, 'twill be better than doctor's stuff for him to know I'm on his side, an' that he needn't fear want in the future."

"'Tis Arscott's business, not yours."

"An' just for that reason I must be doing. Arscott! A cold friend for a man with a broken back!"



The farmer took his walking-stick and was soon upon the road to Belstone. His own affairs had quite escaped from his memory, and he brooded upon this misfortune mournfully. Entering the 'Hearty Welcome' on his way, he found acquaintance, stopped awhile, drank a little and discussed the catastrophe. Then, overflowing with amiable resolves, he hastened forward to the abode of Joshua Bloom.

There he learned that the quarryman had broken his thigh, that he would probably live, but that henceforth active labour must be impossible for him.

## CHAPTER V

### TRIUMPH OF THE LEAVES

UNDER Halstock Wood there winds a little path beside the river. Here had walked Jesse upon the evening that Salome accepted him, and here she had followed afterwards through starry darkness.

Hither they came again during an afternoon in middle spring, and near them, where they sat, Oke, thrust from her level way by an opposing ledge of granite, fell twenty feet abruptly, then gathered together in a pool and then leapt again and resumed her course. The form of the river was like a great, twisted serpent, with a head and tail of foam and a body of brown water. Easterly rose barren hills, and their scattered granites had taken upon them the tone of the sky. Young fern spattered these slopes and made brightness upon them under the diffused and gentle light of an hour that lacked all colours but grey and green.

Through a frame of foliage the river passed, fell into one winding pool, then foamed on again over a second flight of mossy ledges and so disappeared. Now it was white with the imprisoned air and bursting foam bubbles; now it shone grey where the sober sky was reflected in a tremor and crinkle upon the water's brown face. To the west a sharp foreground fell steeply under the woods, and it was pointed and broken by countless up-springing pinnacles and spires of young foliage. Ash and mountain ash, birch and willow prospered

here in lustrous company of mingled greens. From the larger, overhanging boughs of alder and oak through all verdant gradations the hillside shone. Lush thistles rose darkly, bright lady ferns and hard ferns struck the highest note of colour against a dim and shadowed undergrowth. Old ivies trailed and tangled almost black against the infant leaves; briony glittered; great valerian and great burnet contrasted their dainty serrations; glaucous angelicas brought light; honeysuckle and the silver-grey of sallows added cool cloud-colour amid the more vigorous golden-greens. From her deep, sweet couches of earth under the moss, life sprang again in the triumph of the leaves. It was an hour in early June when the rush of the green tumbled like a wave over all other things of field and woodland; broke into each dingle like a flood; swept every valley and meadow, copse and wood; leapt along the water-courses; brightened the fountain unseen; rose to the very summits of the hills; sprang to their crowns in vernal grasses; and touched to new brilliance and tenderness the least little nacreous washes of lichen that clung to the weathered and uplifted peaks of them. For a moment the familiar wild-flower pictures at river's brink were quelled. In shaded glens and coombs the wood-anemones had vanished and from their place, above each triple leaf outspread, there hung a little knob of shining seed. Other early fruits also ripened. At the feet of those who now approached, this steep pageant of the leaves thinned and faded away until a fret of flowering grass-stems ended it. The plumes of the herbage nodded at Salome's knees; beside her hung sanicle's snowy sprays; while the melampyre's lemon blossoms and the orange stars of the woody loosestrife mingled close at hand; but other flowers were few, for the eglantine and woodbine, the

agrimony and meadow-sweet had not yet come; the umbelbearers were budding; the sorrel's pearls were gone; the bluebells passed away.

The leaves conquered, and every harmonious and mingled tint of them now swam together under the tender and pervasive tones of the sky. Nature had taken cloud-colour and mingled it with the fabric of her foliage. The chlorophyl that painted all these glories was permeated with magic of air, so that not one crudity marred this vision verdant. From the deep, pure lustre of the oak to the last pearly glitter of a submerged moss, no discord challenged; and the splendour of form accorded with this wealth of hue, since, despite the mass and coherence of the living things, each found space to display its proper shape and habit, each had power not only to proclaim its achievement, but also to indicate its aspiration.

The light was modulated into concord with those subdued human spirits who now beheld it; but the beauty belonged to the time. It stormed the heart and comforted the senses; it rose superior to grief and triumphed above the accident of sorrow.

With this scene in their eyes and its music of leaf and spray upon their ears, Jesse and Salome sat together, lapped in the milky haze and dewy loveliness of June. The secret of the day awaited them; but it was revealed in vain, for their talk turned upon care and trouble. Some restraint marked it. Explicitly they concerned themselves with the downfall at Watchett Hill; beneath, the catastrophe dwindled to a matter of no vital importance to either. Each harboured a deeper tribulation; each yearned to confess and make the other conscious of the truth; and each shrank back from that great step.

Jesse was a man of quick perceptions, for the least

logical are often the most intuitive. He had long since perceived that his love relations with Salome were incomplete; but the nature of the barrier lifted between his heart and hers he knew not. True to her word, she had been patient and tender after a chill fashion; but never had she abandoned herself to his caresses or returned them. He set that down to maiden reserve and imagined the coolness would depart presently. Instead of vanishing, as dawn's chaste vapour vanishes before the sun, her constraint increased. Sometimes she withheld herself for days from him; sometimes she uttered ambiguous things and, when he demanded explanations, apologised with tears and self-reproaches so bitter that he bade her, for his sanity's sake, blame herself no more. Thinking much upon these difficulties, he settled them presently to his satisfaction. He explained the cause of Salome's unrest and her strange, shadowy emotions of impatience and abject self-scorn. The fault lay with him, not with her. She had unquestionably discovered that his soul was not open to her, that there were locked chambers within it where entry was denied. A girl of such swift mind would not be deceived in this matter. Jesse knew how often his own moods fell upon gloom. These humours doubtless fretted Salome to bitterness in their long walks and talks together. He had told her a thousand times that she knew his whole heart, but she must have discovered, out of her native wit, that this was far from true; she must guess that things of high import were hidden from her. Surely herein appeared ample reason for her own reserves, uncomfortable speeches and impatient tears. He had made her sad and uncertain by his lack of full trust. So he argued; and then he determined to satisfy himself whether this theory was the true one. He designed to ask her

directly if she supposed that he kept a secret from her. He dared not dwell on the sequel, but felt that if Salome upbraided him, how terrific would be the new temptation to share his tragic knowledge with her.

Meantime the woman, far from busying herself with his inner nature, his hopes, or his fears, as love had doubtless done, was self-absorbed. Her own cruel action filled her mind, and Jesse's secrets were a matter of absolute indifference to her. Daily she came nearer to the immediate duty of confession, and it began to be only a question of chance and opportunity whether the man first invited her to partner him in his darkness, or she plucked courage, spoke and undeceived him.

To-day the talk was of Harter, and Salome, half in earnest, half in morbid jest, praised Michael Redvers to his brother.

"What a single eye that youth have got! 'Tis like a child. There's only one living creature in his mind seemingly; an' that's his mother. 'Tis his nature to live on her word, like your dog lives 'pon yours. She'm lucky to have such a son. I doubt he'll never wed."

"There's another side."

"I only speak what I see. A son to lean on an' thank the Lord for. A man's so strong an' certain."

"He'm not half what you an' Barbara are to your father."

"Much — much more. Because much stronger an' steadfaster. What can a brace of forlorn things like me an' sister do?"

"Forlorn you're not; an' 't isn't too kind to say the word."

"I'm sorry then. I mean we'm only forlornly weak where faither's the matter. 'T isn't money, nor

wit, nor courage: 'tis him. If he'd had a son like Michael — or you —— ”

“ You mention me as an after-thought. Better not drag me in. I'm not a Michael. He's worth thousands of me — even in your eyes perhaps.”

“ Don't talk in that hard way, Jesse. 'Tis no time between us for silly quarrels. I owe you more than ever I'll pay or could pay. You've been far, far too good and generous an' kind to me an' mine. But the end's here ; an' I'll never forgive myself when I think that 'twas my work wasted half your savings.”

“ Not wasted — not wasted — don't say that.”

“ Wasted's the word. 'Twas only putting off an' off what had to come.”

“ I'm still hopeful for you. 'Tis a wonderful trick of Mr. Westaway's to plant his wide hope in them that listen. The turnips sowed last July have been a great success, I hear. They comed in grand for the ewes afore they got their first bite in the water-meadows. Such wonderful fine lambs too, he tells me.”

“ Yes, that's faither ! Did 'e tell 'e how many lambs there were ? ”

“ Not the number.”

“ No ; I dare say he don't know, poor old dear. But we know. Barbara an' I be planning a meeting of creditors, since he won't. It's got to come, an' afore harvest it will come. Other things have got to come too. If I wasn't such a weak, broken fool —— ”

“ What is it ? And yet — yet —— ”

He fell back upon his own thoughts and for some time silence lasted between them.

Suddenly she asked a strange question.

“ Be you still of a mind that there's no God A'mighty who knows our hearts ? ”

“ Yes,” he answered. “ An' that's as much as to

say there's none at all. For if a God there was, He would know our hearts—an' everything else there is to know. When first you took me, I changed about that. Out of a mad joy, I went back, an' believed that no such light could come into a man's life if a kind God wasn't responsible for it. Then the months an' months dragged by, an' I grew cold since you comed no closer—my mind, not my heart, Salome. That's as warm a nest for you as ever it was. But my eyes were opened while I waited an' learnt the meaning of patience. I seemed to see that us mustn't build our opinions on our own luck—good or bad—but upon the things that happen an' the way the whole world's run. Joshua Bloom, when he limps from the cottage hospital to the workhouse, might just as well say there was no God, as I might cry on my wedding-day with you that there was one. 'Tis 'pon a general outlook that the talking man in the omnibus had come to mistrust; an' so have I done likewise. If God there be, He made my brain, and the working of the machinery is His care. For my part, 'tis a long sight easier to believe in a watchful devil than a God, when we see faithful, honourable, loyal creatures suffering torture in their lives, like your father, or hell-fire in their hearts, like—some here an' there. For why? Just because they be made of flesh an' blood an' not stone. 'Tis a better case to be bad all through an' hard all through, than bad in bits an' soft all through. The half an' half sort suffers worse, an' they make up the bulk of men an' women. But what do you know about such things—you so simple an' good, with a heart for others' sorrows?"

"A heart for yours belike. That's why I don't speak what I ought to speak."

"What is that you ought to speak an' don't then?"



"Presently — presently. Do you know that cottage back from the road by Church Hill Cross on the way to Sampford Courtenay? Us might have it for ten pound a year."

"Ban't worth five."

"The man would spend three pound upon it, an' there's half an acre of old orchard goes with it, where faither could potter an' keep a few fowls, perhaps."

"I'll see about it if you're serious. I know the chap who owns it. If he'll take eight pound, it might be worth while. What rooms are there?"

"Kitchen, parlour, an' three bedrooms. Me an' Barbara can share one, for of course Mrs. Haycraft will have to go with us. There's nowheres else for her to go."

"Why do you talk as if you would settle there? Surely — surely you're going to marry me some day, Salome?"

"Be I? That's the question. Listen to me now, Jesse, my dear, since we'm on it. I'll play the coward no more. I ——"

"Wait!" he said. "I know exactly what's in your mind. You haven't got a secret from me. Let me speak first, an' that will save you the trouble."

Her heart longed to think him right, but a glance at his face showed her that he knew nothing of her intention. There was interest and agitation upon it, but not sorrow.

"You can't know," she said.

"But I do, and it's just this: you've found me out; an' you're not angry but very naturally sad and puzzled about it."

"Found *you* out, Jesse!"

"Yes — at least you've found there's something to find. You're surprised that I could guess. But a

man's terrible quick in these cases. You've given me all — all your little secrets an' confessions an' hopes; you've let me look into your thoughts, an' share your sadness, an' try in my weak way to comfort; you've held nought back from your husband to be; an' it's hurt you a bit to find him not so frank as you. I've seen your face change often when I've drawn the conversation away from one thing or another. You've been hurt that I wouldn't talk about my father; you've suddenly fallen dead silent on our brightest days; you've sometimes left me in the midst of a walk, or you've bade me leave you. Do you think I don't read these things? I've seen 'em for months; but 'tis only of late that I've seen the reason too. Now, ban't I right?"

She indicated by no sign that he was right or wrong. Surprise alone she showed; and that seemed natural at such a moment.

"Didn't I read you like a book now, Salome?"

"Us all have our secrets," she said slowly; "I ought not to blame you. There's nothing you wouldn't tell me, if you could make me happier by telling it."

The view struck him into silence for a while. Then he said:

"'Tis always the way with your thoughts: they make mine turn into smallness and selfishness. There's things that don't breed joy for the hearer, but may add to the peace of the teller. I'm always thinking of myself at bottom — curse me."

"If I could make you easier in your mind — that's my duty. I don't expect you to make me easier. You've done what any kind, well-meaning soul can do. You ban't built to hold secrets seemingly. But I be. Yes — I've got my secrets too, for all you think I don't understand the meaning of them. Never dream

you know all, or half, about me. The man wasn't born as could learn more than a little about his sweetheart, or any other she. I've got something to tell; an' so have you, you say. But I didn't know you had. 'Tis my own secrets make me blank an' daft an' deaf sometimes.— not hungering after yours."

He stared at her and his jaw fell.

"Secrets — secrets from me, Salome!"

"Scores of 'em — little an' big — black an' white. But only one that matters to you. That you've got to hear. I was going to tell it when you stopped me. As to what you know an' I don't, babble it or treasure it as you've a mind to. I've no wish to hear it."

"I'll hear nought an' I'll tell nought," he answered gloomily. "I was a fool to begin this. Come, rise up an' walk, an' get these beastly fancies out of our heads. There's only one secret on earth I want from you; an' that's the day you'll marry me. When you touch that—does it—does it include that—this mighty secret of yours? If so, 'tis a red-letter secret indeed."

"Yes, it does," she said. "We'll leave it at that. A minute since I could have spoke it; now I can't. Perhaps to-morrow will bring it out."

"I'd pray all night to the God as I don't believe in if I thought 'twould make you tell that secret. But mine — the thing I know — well —"

He stopped and stared at her, because she was laughing. Too seldom he heard the music of that melody; but now his face grew dark, for she laughed at him.

"You with a secret! You'll tell it—you can't help it. You want to; you're burning to! So you shall, then, an' I'll take care of it an' keep it warm. It'll be safe enough with me. You with a great, far-

reaching secret! Your only secret's a miserable soul, Jesse; an' that ban't no secret neither, for it stares out of your eyes for all to see."

"An' what's made my soul miserable?" he asked passionately. "There's a reason at the back of all human misery, I suppose."

"Yes — from outside or inside it comes. My sadness be started outside of me, but yours do begin within. You breed it. Misery's kneaded into the stuff you'm made of. Yet there's not a pin to choose between us. We'm sensible, an' we'm soft, an' there's no balance in our minds, an' no faith to believe what our betters believe. Look at your mother. How often have she prayed me to go to church along with her — prayed me to do it. An' who be I that I should not believe what she tells me?"

"It's no question of goodness or wisdom, but the pattern of the mind," he said. "If I've shook your faith in a lot of worn-out nonsense, so much the better for you. That's neither here nor there. Only don't say and don't imagine that my trouble's born from within. I wish it was. How little you know of me for all your love, Salome."

"I know you very well, I think."

"This secret — if you knew that! How would you take it? Would you forgive me for telling you?"

"Yes — be sure I would, poor chap — like a mother forgives everything her child can say or do."

"If you knew it — sometimes I think you might be an angel of healing."

"Tell it then — tell it an' get it out of you."

"I can't tell it — I can't. There's too much hinges upon it. It goes too deep."

"Cork it up then. I shan't think none the worse of you. There's other people in your mind—that much I see. And if what you know would hurt other people to tell, even though it might ease yourself, you'd be a coward to think of such a thing."

"But if the telling would save another soul?"

"Souls—souls! What a muddle-thoughted man you be—all in a maze! Can you say there ban't no God one minute an' talk about saving souls the next?"

"Let's up and go. We get no forwarder," he answered. "We'll begin over again some other day."

They rose, and silver light fell and brightened the patch in the grass where they had pressed it. Out of an invisible hawthorn fell fragrance, and an unseen bird uttered sudden music. Then from this haunt of peace, Jesse and Salome departed, and returned unrefreshed into the highway.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE GRINDSTONE

THE day had come on which Joseph Westaway's creditors would meet at Watchett Hill, and Michael Redvers discussed the matter with his mother.

"'Tis from no lack of goodwill I do nought," she explained. "I named a hundred to Salome not long since, but she knew better and said, very properly, 'twas only trying to dam the river with a sieve. 'Tis better for all parties that this meeting should be. The trouble don't look so very big really, from the outside point of view. The house we live in be of little consequence."

"Not to you, because you're so large-minded an' rise above the small things that make up small lives, mother; but old Westaway's got no big ideas. The old man will cling like a limpet to Watchett Hill, if they'll let him," declared Michael.

He was at the grindstone in the garden, and his mother stood beside him.

"Yet he would be happier, poor heart, once out of sight of the land, perhaps," she said.

"Happier — or else just fade away an' die. I've knowed that befall ancient men. 'Tis kicklish work uprooting old trees; but he's so soft an' easy — give him a mole-hill for his own an' he'll come round presently."

Michael set the stone spinning and whetted a scythe upon it. Presently he stopped and spoke again.

"Why for do Salome hang back so? What's the sense of it? Do she begin to find that Jesse will be main ill to live with? Be her love dying? 'Tis only to add more furrows to his haggard forehead — this delay. I did think that she might be the one to get sense into him."

"She has done that — plenty of sense in her."

"Then why don't she show it an' take him? Then Barbara would know how she stood as to the future."

Mrs. Redvers nodded.

"I'm with you, Michael. What you say is true enough. But one woman don't like to press another on such a subject."

"No — marriage ban't a thing to push any poor fool into," he said. "I'll allow that much."

"I'll give Mr. Westaway money, if you like. I'll even clear Arcscott, if you like."

He reflected for a moment, then held down the steel and turned the grindstone until a little fountain of fire flashed from it.

"No," he answered, easing off again and feeling the scythe's edge. "Jesse would say 'yes,' but I say 'no.' Not for the money's sake, and not for yours, because I know what money be to you; but for Jesse's sake. Think on ahead a bit. You put old Joseph into smooth water and spend a lot of money. Well, what does he do? Thank God an' take it all for granted, an' go on his way rejoicing. He won't change. 'Tis vain to think he'll grow thrifty an' careful now. He can't — no more than a larch can be so close-grained as an oak. He'll get foolisher with age, an' make more trouble. Then, come Jesse be married to his daughter — an' you know Jesse's nature — 'tis on him the trouble will fall. They'll be dragged down together. As it is, Jesse's throwed away more'n three

figures, I guess. Let 'em cut a loss an' begin in a small way, so that the women can breathe easy after their father dies."

"Barbara would say the same."

"Or anybody. 'Twill be time to lend a hand when they be out of Watchett Hill Farm. To keep 'em there is false kindness. I don't say it for any love of money — you know that."

"You'm right enough," his mother admitted. "Seems that the first thing to do is to get Salome wedded an' the way clear. As to his debts — 'tis there we may help presently, when we hear how it stands with him."

"I only wait for Jesse to bring his wife here," declared Michael; "then you an' me will have good reason for going. I'm weary to death of Harter, an' I'll be very glad to give up an' get off — out of England altogether for all I care — an' work in a new place with new land in my eyes. Why, I'd fetch off to Canada, an' glad to go, if you'd say the word!"

She had herself often speculated on the wisdom of leaving Harter.

"So soon as your gran'mother goes, I'll go," she answered. "But perhaps not out of England."

Michael laughed.

"Her go! She's more likely to come with us. Hard an' sound an' brave as a bell."

Mr. Tapp approached with another scythe-blade at this moment.

"Found at last," he said. "But yet I'm in doubt if such things ban't mere waste iron nowadays. When all's said, I lay you'll be the first to hire a mowing machine in a hurry presently, if the hay in the bottom proves worth saving next month."

"Not me," answered the young man. "I love



scythe work, an' so do you still, though you pretend different."

"I'm for peat-cutting against it," argued Mr. Tapp.

"Rubbish! That's no more than digging. But mowing—look to the swing an' sweep, an' every muscle in back an' thigh an' arm drawn upon. An' the fall of the swathe, an' the smell of the bleeding grass, an' the thirst that comes of it! Man's work, I tell 'e!"

"Where be Jesse to?" asked Mr. Tapp. "There's a soldier riding over the hill. 'Twill be Jesse he wants."

"They are going to fire over Harter, I expect," grumbled Michael. "They always choose the finest days to send us to cover."

"Jesse's at Watchett Hill, be sure," said Ann. "'Tisn't likely he'll be anywhere else to-day."

"They meet at half after noon," answered Nathaniel Tapp. "I spoke with the corn-chandler to Okehampton last night. About eight or nine men will arrive, an' Westaway's lawyer, an' the books. Arscott be safe, it seems. He's got a mortgage. After him in size do come two chaps at Okehampton, an' then Toby Hannaford. I'm 'feared there's a mighty score against the old man at the 'Hearty Welcome.' An' yet the upshot's bound to come right, owing to the nature of the case."

"Ban't often you prophesy fair things," said Michael.

"Not often I have the chance to do it. But where I can get a line through the Book, that line I take. A pity us don't do so oftener, for light blazes off the page, open it where you will. Westaway have got his faults like the best of us, but he's righteous with it; he's righteous: therefore he's safe."

His mistress nodded.

"Sound truth. His sins be no more than a weak-

ness. His heart's too strong for his head. Please God, he'll come through well, an' that 'twill be our part to help him presently. No doubt his trial looks big to him, same as a child's small griefs seem large in infant eyes."

An artilleryman galloped up with a letter.

"For Mr. Redvers," he said.

Michael took the letter and the man rode away.

"'Tis for Jesse. All right. I be off to Belstone first thing after dinner an' will leave this at Watchett Hill on my way."

Then the young man turned to his scythes and Ann went indoors.

Two hours later Michael stood at the door of Mr. Westaway's farm. Unusual trimness marked the yard and outbuildings. Everything was in its place; the fallen soldiers in the fence had been raised; the doorstep was hearth-stoned.

Barbara greeted Michael and showed anxiety as she did so.

"Have 'e seen our old man? The people be all due to come in half an hour, an' if the baggering old dear ban't gone off somewheres an' us can't find a speck of him! He kept very quiet and thoughtful like at dinner; then, when me an' Jesse was going through the figures, an' Salome was clearing the parlour for the creditors, off he hopped. Presently I wanted him about the corn bills, an' not a sign of him."

"No, I haven't seed him," answered Michael. "I've just dropped across with a letter that a soldier brought before noon for my brother. I can't help 'e, Barbara, if I bide, can I?"

She took the letter and shook her head.

"No, thank you kindly. Jesse will do what's to

be done afore lawyer comes. 'We'm wondering if Arscott be likely to drop in. His money's safe enough; still, he may come—for the pleasure of it."

"He will," foretold Michael. "A job like this be better than a free meal to that man."

Barbara jerked an affirmative with her head and made the little, indrawn hiss that stands for 'yes' in Devon.

"An' if you see faither, tell him to hurry back, will 'e? He did ought to put on his black for it, I suppose. 'Tis only respectful when you stand in debt to people."

"Don't take it to heart, Barbara. There's no fault, when all's said—only a misfortune. Us was telling to-day—mother an' me. She's set on lending a hand presently, and so be I. But not here; you'll never have no peace here. Once away, things will soon be easier."

She nodded.

"If us could only get him to take small ideas. There he be! Faither, come this way—don't you go round there. 'Tis only Michael Redvers."

She had seen Mr. Westaway creeping across the cabbage-plot. He was evidently anxious to reach the house unobserved. Now he appeared reluctantly, then blew out his cheeks and endeavoured to look indifferent as Barbara's eyes fell upon certain things that he carried.

"What have you been up to now?" she asked harshly.

But her father pretended not to hear and turned to Michael.

"Nice open weather, my son. How's the grass with you? Jesse's here, giving us a hand with a parcel of figures, you know. The neighbours be coming down presently."

"What's in them parcels, faither?" again inquired his daughter, and old Westaway made answer in a lofty though nervous tone.

"Nothing very wonderful, my dear. Company be company, whatever the occasion; an' that you should know by this time. So I've just fetched along a bottle of sherry wine, an' a bag of biscuits of the better sort, an' a pound cake. That'll be enough; an' if any axes for tea, it must be made."

Michael laughed.

"You'm dying game, old boy!" he said.

Barbara stared helplessly at the cheerful ancient.

"God's goodness!" she cried. "What'll you do next? This ban't a party, be it?"

"In a sense it is," declared Mr. Westaway with firmness. "Michael here will say the same. You females, as eat an' drink no more than would keep a mouse alive, don't understand the feeding nature of men. Wherever the male sex assemble themselves—onless to church or at hounds—eating an' drinking have got to be done. A wedding or a funeral calls for solids; a meeting of creditors in my judgment can be passed off very well with a light snack like this here. After all, 'tis more cunning than friendship, for hospitality be the first step to an easy temper, an' nought softens the heart like pretty drinking paid for by somebody else. This here brown sherry will breed greatness of mind in 'em, an' help 'em to live an' let live."

"Hannaford didn't ought to let you have it, knowing what he've got against you."

"Don't be small, my dear," answered Mr. Westaway. "Take the higher view, as I do, Barbara; an' fetch the corkscrew."

He marched off, and his daughter, with a hopeless

gesture, followed him, while Michael grinned and proceeded to Belstone.

Upon the way he passed William Arscott, Toby Hannaford and a half dozen other men, walking over to Watchett Hill.

## CHAPTER VII

### SALOME HEARS

**S**ALOME walked in the broom patch very early on the morning of a September day. The autumn furze and heath commingled and wrought huge blended masses of colour upon the hillside. Their pattern extended aloft towards the naked crown of Halstock Hill and swept richly to the river below. Here its brilliance was increased by sudden splashes of bright sphagna, where springs broke. Warm sunshine still haunted the hollows, and humblebees droned in many yellow flowers; but aloft, on the high lands, frost crept by night, winter again approached, and the light was already dying out of the herbage.

Salome Westaway moved here in a moment of rest between hours of severe labour. At Michaelmas her father was to leave Belstone for the cottage at Church Hill Cross, and already the articles necessary to complete this reduced home had been separated from the bulk of the furniture at the farm. Boxes were being packed and preparations for departure occupied each hour. Weary of the painful business and driven by sudden longing for loneliness and silence, Joseph Westaway's younger daughter now walked with her thoughts upon the past. Then she strove to banish memories, so that Oke's present music might soothe her spirit.

Chance brought Jesse Redvers to her, and from

peace she was plunged straightway into the highest experience of her life.

Upon his road in another direction, he had caught sight of Salome far off, and hastened to her side. He welcomed the event. As he approached her, it occurred to him how those pleasures that flash up unexpected by life's way, dawn with richest light upon the heart and leave the sweetest savour when they are gone.

"I seed 'e near a mile off, an' I guessed you was having a rest from the fret an' tear an' dust at home."

"It's all working very swift to the end now."

"He won't come round?"

"Not in the matter of money. He says what's true: there's no need to offer them less than all. Twenty shillings in the pound they are to have; though you remember they was all quite willing to take less."

"'Tis the word 'bankrupt' he can't suffer. Of course he won't be that."

"No; we shall pay it off spread over a fair flight of years. Arscott's cleared, thank God. He's took the policy from us. With a little good that gathered on it, 'twill pay him well."

"Don't speak of him. Come with me, Salome. There's no firing to-day an' I'm going out over to cut another nitch of reeds. Will 'e come?"

She reflected. Opportunities to speak had been rare through summer, and even still with regard to her engagement nothing definite was done.

"I'll come," she said. "But I've got a word to say will make you sorry that ever you axed me to come. Long, long ago you should have heard it."

This he laughed off impatiently; and in the event Salome never spoke, for the man talked instead, and

by his utterance and confession changed their relations for ever.

He was downcast as usual. He laboured under the burden of his soul: he approached the inevitable and ruling subject by a circuitous road familiar enough to himself. In Salome's ear, however, his references sounded unusual, and not until afterwards did she comprehend their tenor. Then indeed, in the light of the truth, she understood how the man's mind turned but one way — how every train of untutored thought, how each cloud of hopeless doubt sprang from the same cause and revolved round about the same horror.

"If it could be proved as there was no free will, what a load off the world's shoulders — eh, Salome? Have 'e ever thought of that?" he asked as they set foot forward to the west.

"No, I have not. I don't understand such things. What is free will? I suppose everybody's free to go up hill or down — to eat or starve?"

"Not one of us — not one. That's proved beyond gainsaying. And where there's no free will, there's no power to do, or not do; an' where there's no choice there's no sin. Guilt — yes; but not sin — not a thing to be punished for. Do you understand that?"

"What a word-spinner! An' you groping among 'em — lost in your own smoke. You ought to have been a parson — an' yet — no, you didn't; for there's no help for unhappiness in you. All chopping an' hair-splitting; but no more comfort than comes out of a rainy dawn."

"Comfort enough, if I could make one here an' there see it so. But I've tried an' failed. But I'd try ten thousand times if I thought I'd succeed at last. Guilt's a natural thing. Wrong-doing's part of nature.



Without it you couldn't have right doing — same as there's no shadow unless the sun shines."

"Well, where's the help to say that evil's a natural thing? Even if a body believed it — then what? It don't cure heartaches."

"The point is that you may be guilty an' yet commit no sin at all, Salome."

"Well, suck comfort out of that, if you can. To me 'tis only a string of words — a poor exchange for believing in something that eases the drag of living. That's what I seek an' can't find no more. You know so much, that you ought to talk with wise heads, an' learn a bit deeper, Jesse. Where you've reached to be like a cat up a tree — can't get up an' can't go back."

"That's true enough," he said. "I'm hungering to learn more, an' understand what must take the place of all I've throwed over. Who's to teach me? But the time will come. There's many like me now in the world. I know a dozen. They feel the edge of change, same as a sailor-man feels the edge of storm, or the promise of wind. Think now, if a person had done a terrible thing that put 'em in the reach of the law. An' think if you could make 'em see that they was guilty but not sinful. I know 'tis a difficult subject for a woman's mind. It have took me many a sleepless night to see it. Suppose now as you'd got a secret from the world, Salome; an' you wasn't sure whether you'd done a right thing or a wrong one. Then suppose me, or anybody, could come along an' show you what you'd done was no sin at all, but the result of your being yourself."

This hypothesis interested the woman: but the problem had long since been solved by her.

"Your heart tells you if 'tis sin or not," she said.

"But who, over-driven by the parsons, can listen to

their hearts? What's the voice inside to the thunder of the Ten Commandments booming in our ears from childhood?"

"You can break 'em here an' there an' sleep none the worse," she admitted.

"I should hope so! That's solemn truth, anyway. There's less of God in them graven stones of Moses than there was in the naked rocks he left on the mountain. There's possible cases when a man might break 'em all—an' 'twould be no sin. I thought 'em out—every one."

"You'll think yourself mad some of these days. Stealing means prison, an' murder means hanging—call 'em guilt, or sin, or any other name. What's the use of wasting your sleeping hours with such flimsy stuff? If you was wiser, you'd go your secret way, same as most other people, an' keep your mouth shut. Then nobody's hurt."

But he was only concerned with the first part of this speech. The fierce impulse to make Salome a confidante mastered him at last. His nature, divided against itself, fell. Caution and patience were forgotten; fury and desire took their place. The wish to tell was a passion and often he had conquered it; but now it conquered him. Jesse shouted down his other self and told her all.

"But if these things are under your own eyes? If another person's deed is eating her, like a cancer, bit by bit? If you see a human soul living in torture? Then it is that you'd give your own life's blood to the last drop if you could only make them feel the power of ideas. I'd speak till I wearied time if I thought it was any use. If you knew—if you knew all that I know, how patient, how gentle you would be!"

"But I don't know. An' I don't know the real

ill that words ever cured either. Words are a poor plaster for live trouble."

"Not words—not words—the things they stand for. To look on at one you love and see her ground into the red-hot ashes of hell for what she have done—just because she takes one view, when she might take another."

"Somebody has done evil, and knows it for evil, and smarts. What of that?"

"But perhaps it wasn't evil."

"You think that 'twasn't evil?"

"Once I did—now I'm doubtful. It's the hardest thing in the whole world to judge of any human action, for we can't see all of it."

"Well, if your opinion is anything to her——"

"Salome, 'tis my own mother."

"Then better say no more about it to me. You'm not made of the stuff to alter her opinions; no more be I."

"That was the thing I told you of. That was the darkness you saw brooding over me day and night. That was what I could not share with you. But now I must share it. I would help her; I would die to help her; but the help she wants is far too awful for a son to give. Michael is on her'side as he thinks—poor fool! In truth he's her evil angel! If you knew—I think sometimes—an' yet—what could you do to comfort her—an innocent girl that's never felt nought of the awful edge of life?"

"I've marked that she is dark in her heart; but such a wise, woeful fashion of woman be far too deep for me to comfort. Can the grass comfort the tree that's been struck down by lightning?"

"You understand—you've got the gift of understanding. You see there's more looking out of my

mother's miserable eyes than widowhood. Deep pools they be, stained — stained, like the bloody red foam of the freshets. You shall know the little there's left to know. I can't hold it back against you. If I'm wicked, I'm wicked; if I'm damned to eternity, let it be so. 'Tis nature driving — I must. It's bursting my head now — now — as it burst my heart long since."

She looked into his frenzied face, but hazarded no guess at the matter in his mind.

"Tell me nothing that I'm powerless to mend," she said. "If I could bring balm to your mother to-morrow, I'd do it; if I can't lessen her griefs, what is the use of adding to mine?"

"You must hear it now and you shall. 'Tis time, an' far more than time. I'm mazed to think how long I hid it from you; but now I see — clearer than I see most things, that I can't be your husband and keep this skeleton between our hearts. Salome — Salome — pity her: she killed my father."

They stood in a valley of riven morasses and inky pools, where darkness spread like a pall even at high summer. Life shunned the inveterate slough and gloom encompassed it. Here was a region meet enough for this appalling confidence.

Redvers believed that sympathy with his own long-borne distress would presently come from Salome. Other emotions he first expected; but it seemed that she quite failed to understand. The woman stood still, looked at him with wonder and reflected upon his utterance, but said nothing.

"Speak!" he cried. "Speak to me."

Then by her words she showed that his meaning was still hidden from her.

"If she did that, why didn't she tell it? What an awful accident for her."

"She wanted to tell. She implored us to let her tell. Michael wouldn't suffer it."

"Why not? Poor woman — poor woman! 'Twas another horror added to loss of him. But surely nothing but more sympathy could have come of it? All living folk must have pitied her when they heard of such a dreadful misfortune. An' him — 'twas another pang to death for him, if he knowed what she had done. Pray God he didn't."

Jesse stared dully at her sad, questioning face. Then he stamped his foot, like an angry woman.

"Hell do play with me an' make my very words a fog-bank that hides things. Can't I speak plain even to you? But you shall know — you shall have it in your brain and in your heart! She killed him because she meant to kill him — 'twas murder. Is that clear now?"

The woman fell back at this; she stood stricken; she rolled her eyes round her and sank suddenly down. A sloping stone offered support and she reclined and drooped upon it.

"My legs be turned to water," she said. For a moment some freak of the brain brought upward from chaos the consciousness of this physical sensation, and that alone.

"Think — think what this has been to me, Salome."

But she did not hear him. She was panting. A great flame of pity for the dead scorched her and made her blood cry for air. Presently her thought leapt to the wife, and then the stone beneath her imparted its hardness to her body. Every muscle became tense. Her attitude on the rock grew like a couchant sphinx — watchful, feline.

"Ann Redvers — There's only one thing that woman would ever have done murder for."

"He was unfaithful. None ever found out who the she was. But mother somehow got to know; and in the first blaze of her wrath ——"

Salome put her head down on her hands to hide her eyes. Hate and rage shook her light body; but feminine instinct hid the truth unconsciously. No desire to conceal it touched her mind; only an impulse of self-preservation worked without volition. She did not confess, and yet some outlet was necessary for nature. Therefore in a flood upon the man she poured forth the fury and passion that gathered within her against the woman.

"You knew it—all this time; you hid it—you that loved your father so! You nursed it; an' now you stand here an' say that his murder was no sin. Love! God's Heaven! To say you loved him! Liar—to say it! What filth be you made of that can come afore me an' cry out this wretch ban't a sinner? Such a man as him—Anthony done to death by her foul hands; and you to fiddle with long words and fool's thoughts till you try to think her ——"

"My mother, Salome."

"She-wolf! To kill him—a soul as high above us—any of us—as heaven above earth. An' you knowed, an' kept it in—an' now you tell me—what? To comfort her, to go an' kiss her cheek, an' stroke her bloody hands, an' bleat about no sin? Black, stinging snake! Such a man—light in darkness. May ten thousand curses break her back and drag her down."

"They have."

"An' ten thousand more fester in her heart. May worse worms gnaw her than Judas feels. Oh, God!—you stare at me with her eyes. Don't you *know* what you've said? But you don't—how should you?

Poor, daft zany! You never know nothing. A leaf in the wind—a voice crying misery in the dark. An' you'd bid me talk with her—an' touch her—an' swear she's all good? A model woman—a saint to pray to. I'll—I'll do such things that——”

“Stop!” he said, and his voice in anger out-roared her screaming. “Stop this madness an' hear me. Are you out of your mind? Who made you my judge—or hers? I may be wrong or right; but I've come to believe, after such battle of brain as few be called to suffer, that it's not my part to make a meddle with this. Nor is it yours. I had to choose between giving her up or letting her go on. She had to choose between herself an' her son Michael. She chose wrong, as I think. Rather than he should kill himself if she died by the law, which he would have done, she kept this secret an' went on living with it. What that meant you can tell by looking at her.”

“You believe any trash they tell you. 'Twas a cowards' plot between them. Her and Michael hatched it to keep your mouth shut! To think I've breathed her air an' ban't poisoned!”

He stared at Salome's awful bitterness and still could not understand. His love was armour impenetrable against the truth. He never glanced at it.

“Listen till I've done, an' don't rave against the unhappiest woman in the world,” he said. “What's come to you? You're like a fiend with hate in your eyes—instead of woman's pity for the awfulest suffering that ever stilled and froze a human heart. I've seen it for years—working like death. I've watched her; I've bled for her soul as the time went by. And now—from the higher knowledge an' wisdom that have come of late to my mind—I've got to see that there's hope for her—as much as there is for any

other suffering creature. Her religion's the rub. It damns her for ever; but faith's a man-made thing. Heaven an' hell are words, not places. Therefore all she has done is to ruin her life; because death is death, as the wise know; not beginning again, as the foolish think. Who'd ax for another life that have been through a full life here? Who'd want more than sleep, come the end? Not my mother. But she do steadfastly believe that eternal fire will be her bed, and flames her pillow. Change that; lift her out of that. 'Tis our only hope. She'd give herself up to-morrow, but she's had her punishment—as terrible as her spirit was strong to bear it. Nought small could have suffered as she has. And now I've told you, Salome, because I couldn't do otherwise. I fought long not to tell you; but knowed every time I conquered my wish, that the time was coming when 'twould conquer me. I've told you, because you'm my wife, or next thing to it now. An' I've told you for my poor, tortured mother's sake, so well as your own. Think of all this has meant. But her dark soul have gone out to you somehow. I marked it an' was glad; an' there grew a hope and a sort of prayer in me that you'd make her see what I cannot. She'm bone of the world's bone, flesh of the world's flesh, like all of us. She'm not outside the law. She had to do what she done. There was no choice put afore her. That's why I don't believe in this jargon about free will; because through her grief I've got to love her only less than I love you, Salome."

"Did you ax her if you should tell me?"

"No; but well I knew she'd not mind. She'd thank me if I bade the town crier utter it high an' low. As for telling you, it had to be."

Salome rose to her feet again.

"That last's the truth, if the rest ban't," she an-



swered coldly. Her agitation was now calmed ; her face had grown the older for this confession.

"Yqu had to tell it. You're built so ; an' you're built to find reasons for telling it — reasons to excuse your softness to yourself. I know. Every fool can excuse his folly very wisely to his own heart."

"It was not folly to tell you, Salome. 'Twas the first wisdom I've showed for many a long day. I'm a weak fool enough — an' as miserable as weak ; but not in this. I'm strong in this. I trust you with the awful thing, because you are already the best part of myself."

First she hated both him and his mother. Then they faded out of her thoughts and she only saw the new-made dead. Her love and worship, her loss, her long secret desolation flooded her heart. As dew upon thirsty earth ; as the warm rain upon the fallow parched by eastern winds, there came pure pity for that vanished spirit. The hard outlines of the woman's shape relaxed and her nostrils trembled ; her head bent down ; she sank again upon the rock by the way and every line of her flowed into the abandonment of grief.

Jesse stood by and breathed out thankfulness to see her weeping. Her first attitude had frightened and then angered him. Now he grew contented and began to hope. For a moment his soul became sanguine ; he even fancied that he saw peace as the sequel of his utterance.

"In time, when the awful shock of it grows less, I'll explain to you how this is not all that it looks," he began. "But you're in no case to hear what I see so plain myself yet. Your reason must grow calm again first. Just now 'tis enough for you to know, and to promise you will hide what you know. We must never breathe this terror to a soul, Salome — only

to her. You'll do much for her presently — 'tis your destiny to be a blessing. I know you better than you know yourself. Forgive, an' pity, an' love. You must do what you are built to do, like all of us; an' you are your gentle father's daughter still."

She did not hear him now, for an inner fire had suddenly scorched up her tears. One desire took form and grew swiftly. It blotted out all lesser things, as thunder-clouds blot light from the sky. The man murmuring beside her sank into nothing and less than nothing. The noise of the wind in the rushes meant more than the words of his voice. For him she felt no other emotion than profound indifference. As a stone set to stay the wheel, he had played his part, and was left behind when the wheel rolled on; as a match that had served to light a candle, he was blown out and forgotten. She looked through him at his mother. Hills and clouds became transparent; the earth between her and Ann Redvers dissolved until they stood face to face. The desire to stand so in reality made her leap upon her feet and hurry a few swift paces from Jesse's side. Then she remembered that Mrs. Redvers was from home and would not return until the following week. Thereupon she came back to Jesse and played a part.

"You suffered your share of this too?" she said.

"I have forgotten how much. If I could remember, I should go mad. Sometimes I think 'twas I murdered my father. I could not have endured more if I had done so. Long I've been near the breaking point. Thank God, you're coming to the stage of pity for me, Salome. I knew that you would."

"Yes; there ought to be pity moving for you. I'll turn back now. I'm a thought sick an' faint. I want to let this sink into me an' try an' understand all it means."

"When she comes home from Holsworthy, you'll see my mother, Salome?"

"I will."

"You must think carefully first. You must say just the proper thing, as well you know how. And Michael Redvers must never know that you know."

"I forgot him. He'd do for you if he thought you had told me this?"

"Likely enough. Not that death's an evil, until I think of you. But I hunger for a little evening light of happiness along with you, Salome, afore I die. Surely it ban't too much to hope, an' us so young still?"

"'Happiness'! You know what you know an' ax for that! How does happiness square with things doing what they must do? Where's the room for happiness in the head that have got brains in it an' eyes in it?"

"You're learning fast, Salome," he said bitterly.

"Yes, Jesse, — fast enough. You're a good teacher — seeing the little you know yourself. An' now I'll be going back along."

"And tell Barbara that Michael and me will come up this evening to help load the carts. Don't you lay a finger to they heavy things. 'Twill only strain your body."

She nodded and left him. For a few minutes he watched her walk away; then he turned and reached the reed-bed, and brought from beneath a stone the sickle that he had hidden there on his last visit.

Thus tamely ended that pregnant interview. While he worked, she tramped homeward; while he felt some relief dispel his first doubts, she experienced a scornful wonder that the man still groped in the dark and failed to perceive the truth even after the things that she had cried to him in her grief and rage.

Now wrath clouded down upon her heart as memory led her back into the days before Anthony Redvers died. She yearned with a ravenous longing to stand before the wife, to confess her own secret, and then to blaze her knowledge of this murder into the world.

Upon the way home she stood like a granite woman and stared at Harter until the mists in their mercy hid it from her.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE 'WOMEN

FOR two days after the departure of Joseph West-away and his daughters from Watchett Hill, people saw nothing of them. A sale followed the exodus; but none of those chiefly interested were present at it.

Michael attended for his mother, who was still at Holsworthy. He made a few small purchases, and other friends also bought remembrances of the family. Dealers from Exeter were interested in some old furniture and an ancient kitchen dresser that possessed extrinsic value. Without these additions, however, the total result of the sale must have proved very trifling.

Jesse saw nothing of Salome for some days after their visit to the rush beds. Then, on the night that followed his mother's return home, he started for Church Hill Cross in the twilight after a day of rain. At the same hour Salome, who knew that Ann Redvers was again at Harter, set out for the farm. She and Jesse approached each other at a right-angled meeting of high roads a mile from Belstone; but she saw him coming before he knew that she was near, and hid herself at a gate until he had passed by. Then she returned to the road again and hurried forward.

From the storm of this revelation two dominant ideas had taken shape and grown within Salome. They were the same that first leapt in her spirit when Jesse spoke with her. She would confess to Ann Redvers

the truth concerning herself; she would then go straight into Okehampton and make public announcement of the murder. Salome saw no side issues and reckoned with none but Ann. She proposed to accost her alone; then hurry to revenge. Once only she considered her own position and dismissed the subject as insignificant. Vengeance, as she understood it, was actually in her power, and she shrank from no personal sacrifice that might be involved thereby. Of her father, her sister and their credit, she did not think. She lived for the task before her, and the ancillary aspects of it hardly appeared. Sometimes she puzzled to know what accident had revealed the secret to Anthony's wife; sometimes she wept under the darkness while Barbara slept in the bed beside her. She panted to proclaim the truth to Ann and trample it into her heart. Ages seemed to drag past before the widow returned home.

Salome stumbled over the night-clad desert and hated the familiar way for its length. The miles stretched endless to her fiery feet; it seemed that Harter would never heave up its chimneys out of the darkness. But she moved swifter than she knew, and at length walked up the winding way to the farm. Then she stood at the threshold and paused to recover breath before knocking at the door. She turned her back to the house a moment and looked out at the Moor. The clearness after rain was apparent and darkness dwindled. The stars glittered to the black, uneven billows of the earth's horizon; the ridges of Belstone tors seemed very close. Then a craving filled Salome to say what she was going to say under the sky.

Mrs. Redvers herself opened the door.

"There now! If you haven't passed each other in the dark," she said. "What a pity."

"I know it. The man went by me, because I saw him first and hid myself. I want you — not him."

"Come in then. You've hit the right evening. I'm alone, for all the men are out and Sarah Tapp is to bed with a face-ache."

"I'd sooner speak out of doors, if 'tis the same to you."

"I mustn't, my dear, though 'tis a fair night after the rain. But I've a stiff neck and I promised Michael to bide indoors till it be easy."

"He's very careful of you."

"Such a son — he hates me to work if I've got a finger-ache!"

Salome entered and Ann Redvers shut the door and followed her. Now they stood face to face in the kitchen and Ann spoke.

"Take off your hat. Will 'e have a glass of milk? 'Tis warm walking even on the Moor to-night. I'm afraid you have gone through many a tiring day since last we met, my dear."

The other began instantly, without a word of warning or introduction.

"I've come knowing the black truth against you, Ann Redvers — every word. Jesse's told me all — all of it."

A great breath escaped the elder. She thought of her son.

"Poor lad — poor lad! I've hoped he'd do it. I thank God he has. For many reasons I wanted for you to know. 'Twasn't a thing to keep back from one who is to mix her blood with ours."

"You killed your husband with your own hands, because he loved another better than you."

Ann stood beside the peat fire with her face in the light of a lamp. Salome was opposite.

The elder spoke.

"To hear it on another mouth, an' that mouth a woman's! 'Tis like a dream to me. Shall you have courage to do what Jesse couldn't?"

"Who was it — did he tell you that?"

"Be merciful; be just to me, Salome. True mercy, I mean; not weakness now. Think of the awfulness of the thing; the deadly wickedness. Don't be gentle: don't seek any thought that will make it look less. Don't find no excuses — there are none."

"'Excuses'! I'd like to put the rope round your neck with my own hand!"

"Then, for God's love, go to them as will, while you'm in that mind. It may be your part, even in the eleventh hour, to save a soul!"

"I axed you who she was."

"An' I axed him; but he was wise. 'Thank God you don't know,' was the word he answered; an' I've lived to do the same. To thank God an' to pray to Him for her — often — often."

"Your prayers! A devil's prayers that only Satan in hell would hear! Do you know who I be — do you know that? God's lightning blast your stony eyes — cold-blooded, man-killing fiend! I — I — I was his secret woman — I that stand here now. I loved every hair of his head — every breath of his voice. His joy was mine, and his sadness. I lived for him waking, an' sleeping I dreamed of him. He was my sun, an' air, an' food. I only nursed my flesh an' kept it plump an' sweet for him. I thanked God every day of my life that 'twas my blessed lot to make him a little happier, an' kiss away the clouds you brought to his brow. Hear it — open your ears, will 'e! Don't stare. I ban't a ghost. His very own I was — part of himself to share his real life — not you



— never you ; you was always outside. You killed him — that's all you done for him, blighted his beautiful life — then ended it ! ”

The inevitable enormous wonder of Ann Redvers was not concealed. Discovery of her own deed had brought no pang, but rather awakened gladness and vague hope. For the moment that matter vanished and her master passion was pure curiosity. The wife stood there and gazed with profound interest upon her husband's mistress. Not a spark of anger touched her face or her heart before these scorching words. She hardly heard them. Only the fact overwhelmed her. She stared stupidly dumb. She almost gaped at Salome.

“ Glare your snake's eyes out of your head ! Look at me. 'Twas I you killed him for ; an' my black's against my bosom — see — ever since he died.”

She tore open her dress and showed the colour of mourning against her white skin.

“ But you — you wear yours to the light — your heart was glad to put him away. I'm his widow — not you ! 'Tis I suffered till my bones nearly comed through my skin — not you. 'Tis I roamed the hills an' cursed God — not you. You went to church an' wept water for all the world to see. I cried blood that nobody saw. An' now your thread be spun, as sure as the sun rises. 'Tis over — your secret's torn out — an' I'll die a proud woman to have revenged him.”

Still the other did not answer, and these whirling words fell unheeded as leaves in autumn. It seemed that Ann's eyes were occupying every function of sense. They fed upon Salome, touched her, traversed her from head to foot, inquired darkly and passionately concerning her body. They looked through her, ravished her, drained her and left no physical or mental part unpossessed.

Sudden tears leapt to the eyes of the frenzied girl. Her head began to whirl.

"Be you dumb?" she sobbed out. "Can't I bring the blood to your cheek? Can't I fright your evil heart? Would you kill me too?"

Then the other spoke, and her voice echoed her present emotion. Coldly she answered, and as yet nothing but present interest informed her words.

"You! you — at the very gate of Harter! You that he found so filling! . . . A slip of a girl, not growed to roundness of body or fulness of mind! . . . Be what the men like always half hid from us — same as what we like be hid from them? But we hide our thoughts only; they hide their lives. But presently — surely sooner or later — truth flames out, an' then . . . Poor woman! The things that females will rise to! An' you hid it. What ban't there we can't hide?"

"Nought beyond the time. Your God's fooled you. You'll hang — hang an' die for him. An' I'll rejoice, an' let the world know what I was, an' what I've done for him living an' dead."

"My thought turns like a whirlwind turns," said Ann. "How clear I see your heart! Suffer? Yes, I'll wager you've suffered in your own poor, brute way. Yet — I don't understand all of you even yet. How came it you could do so wickedly by my boy? He never hurt you. You to play with him an' lie to him so cruel — you that was meat for his master an' separated from him for ever?"

"I know — I know. That was the only wickedness I've got against myself. All the rest be goodness, an' past joy, an' very sweet to call to mind. I made him a happy man — Anthony — my Anthony. 'Twas feeble an' foul of me to take Jesse's poor pence for my father's sake. 'Twas wicked, an' I'm shamed I done

it. 'Tis the only thought that does shame me — a small smart compared to all I've suffered. When he died I was tortured so that I screamed to God A'mighty to push time an' lessen my agony. But 'twas you I'd got to curse — you as took a kind, loving, useful life for filthy jealousy; because you wouldn't let another woman give him the love you hadn't got in your own cold heart! But I knowed his goodness; my love read him, as only love can read a man. I'm proud to stand here an' say it — proud to be the one to point you out, to make you writhe afore every eye, to strip the lying black off you, an' set the world on you till you suffer same as me — an' worse than me."

To Ann the matter of the other's assault was of minor interest contrasted with the absorbing subject of Salome's personality. But now she set herself to answer these furious threats. The intense alertness of her face relaxed; the strain of her eyes diminished. She turned from her bewildering wonder to the lesser argument of the other's rage and threatened action.

"If I could show you my heart, girl, I would," she began. "'Girl' I say, for more you're not in years. Words — words — why, do 'e think a whole flooded river of words can hurt me, as have suffered from my own poisoned thoughts till light was darkness an' every sunrise a new grief? To set this world on me — me that have lost the next! Can the eyes of men an' the fingers of women hurt me? Can all the horror an' abomination of human kind add weight to the heap that's here, or make this load heavier? Let them pelt an' curse! An' yet the noise of rain upon the river couldn't fret me less. If they might but drive me out, an' cut me off from the living! But 'tis too late, Salome. Once I thought by losing my life to save it. But salvation is not for me. Don't you know —

can't you rise to a high frame of mind an' dream what it is to listen to the savage part hiding in every heart, and to kill the thing you love best? When you do that, you kill yourself, an' go out of life an' stand apart for evermore. An' what be going to hurt me, that am dead? A rope, an' angry men an' frightened women! Me — me that have faced hell-fire an' eternal damnation day an' night since that hour! The empty shadows of humans to fright me! Can they hide the solid shapes I live with? Can their living eyes burn like his everlasting, unshut dead ones? Can their groans an' curses touch me home like his silence? Can their frowns torture me like his smiling? Ay — in death he smiled; an' ever since — clearer than my sons' faces at noon — have I seen him at my feet — the only peaceful thing in all that raging storm."

She ceased and Salome did not speak. The younger's bosom still rose and fell deeply; but her passion for the moment grew numbed before this deep, impassive voice.

"You mad soul, the thing you threaten I pray to God for night an' day. 'Tis a prayer that, if you could see prayer, would clothe me like a garment, an' hide me like smoke of fire. 'Tis always floating from my heart. I killed him because he wouldn't give you up when I axed him. You! To think it. . . . An' after, when I meant to take my proper punishment, the business of human souls began and I was faced wi' my son Michael an' his salvation. No less than that. First 'twas his body touched my mother's heart; then the awfuller thought of his soul. Think if he'd killed hisself. Self-murder's the worst, for there's no place to repent, an' a soul goes out lost for ever from the body it dwelt in. I've lived in the flesh for him; and now I'll die for myself. As a Christian I've no

right to hope; as a human I still be weak enough to do it. That's how it is with me, you poor, wild woman."

Salome, lifted by these words into a domain above passion, looked strangely upon Ann. Even so one might look when, awaiting a human creature, there confronts us a figure of stone, or a spirit intangible. And air-drawn indeed was Ann in the eyes of the younger. To Salome these deep certainties rooted upon the dogma of eternity were startling. Long since all such beliefs had sunk for her into shadow-land, and she could not immediately grasp an attitude of mind so far removed from her own. Such terrible convictions thus proclaimed were like a sudden thunderstorm. Her father, devout though he was, never touched upon these aspects of his faith. That they should thus be woven into the tragic realities of life, as matters themselves alive and vital, amazed this pagan girl; and Ann's indifference to the horror of discovery mightily impressed her. For a moment her anger sank to extinction. Then another word was remembered and woke it anew. 'I killed him because he wouldn't give you up'—thus had Ann spoken. That was all that concerned Salome. What mattered this jargon of life and death and hell? The cross waves of different emotions made her physically giddy. She sat down suddenly and shivered.

Ann spoke again, and now her voice was gentle and touched with tenderness. That monotonous solemnity with which she had almost intoned her own terrific case vanished from it, and her speech was turned to a milder, more broken measure.

"Don't do anything out of anger. This be an awful thing—awful at dawn, an' noon, an' night. Don't let it drive you mad. Think afore you strip your own

heart naked afore the world. There's your father, your sister, an' yourself."

The pity in her voice set the other raging again. But such sustained orgasm of wrath told its tale and crushed Salome into unconsciousness before she had done.

She rose to her feet and answered.

"Myself? Myself? An' don't I think of myself? An' my duty too? My duty to him? 'Tis my part to right him, an' revenge him. I was let go on living after he died for this. I wondered often why for I didn't die. An' now I know. The proper end to this be your end—not mine; an' if I didn't give you up, I should be false to him—false as that poor, slack-witted son of yours. Think of myself? What be I but the useless part of a broken thing—half buried? He loved me. You can't kill that—you can't fling that down a well. Loved me he did, with such a torrent of fire from his great heart as you never lighted for another or warmed at yourself. I was good enough for him. An' where's the shame to let the whole world know that? I'm raging proud of it! To be—to be a murderess——"

As she spoke a man passed the open window and heard her uplifted voice; but before he came into the house, Salome was still. She ceased to speak upon that dark word; her eyes rolled up and she fainted and fell forward in a heap. Her last flicker of consciousness was visual, and she saw a figure pass by the window at the moment of her collapse.

Presently the woman recovered, stared vaguely about her and found Michael gazing steadily upon her face and Mrs. Redvers kneeling beside her.

Then Ann spoke, and Salome imagined from the speech that her son had heard nothing.

"Say no more now — I'll talk to Jesse to-night."

Again Salome caught Michael's glance; and then she understood. He knew, but he had hidden his knowledge from his mother. His face told her the thing in his heart; while Ann appeared ignorant.

"Yes — tell him what he don't know," she said. "Tell him, an' all the world."

"Michael can go part of the way back with you presently. Be you better now?"

"I'm well — 'twas the strain. Us have all been through a good deal of late. No call for Michael to trouble."

The man continued quite silent. He stood by the door and waited for her. Mrs. Redvers went to a cupboard and brought out Nathaniel Tapp's bottle of cordial. She poured spirits into a wine-glass and then added milk.

"Drink," she said to Salome. "Nay, you must do it. 'Twill brace up your nerves. There — would you rather bide a bit, or be you ready? Walk slow. Michael shall see you as far as Jesse anyway."

Then Salome perceived that the mother was indeed ignorant of Michael's knowledge. He put on his hat and waited for her, and still said not a word.

The strange sense of some tremendous danger got hold of Salome; but she felt a drowsy and deadened indifference to it, as a man might under a lion's paw. This silence of Michael affected her will power: there was the strength and resistless movement of a natural force in it. Yet the dominion appeared not painful. She believed that when he got her alone on the Moor, he would take her life; but the belief begot no fear. She was well content to go with him and let him silence her if he would. Upon her fainting fit and storms of rage a recoil had followed. Stark apathy

marked her mental attitude now. Death or life, secrecy or publicity — none mattered to her. She was tired out. If she lived until rest and sleep had restored, she knew that she might feel again; but for the moment she could feel no more.

"Thank you kindly, Michael," she said. "I'm very glad to go with you."

They went out together. She took his arm in sight of his mother. Its size and hardness pleased her curiously.

"Don't shake me off till we'm out of sight," she whispered to him. "'Twill deceive her. She don't know that you know: I do."

Still he made no answer, but let her arm remain within his own.

Now light touched the dark earth with tracteries of silver fire. In marsh and valley opaque vapours lay; and some spread motionless as coverlets of the dead; and some, touched with the breath of the wind, curled upward like mist-lilies that opened petals of pearl under the moon. Immense Night, minister and servant of living things, brought comfort and strength to those who woke, and blessed oblivion for the slumberers, within her starry precincts.



## CHAPTER IX

MICHAEL — SALOME — JESSE

THE nightly sharpness brought strength to Salome and she moved her hand from Michael's arm. Still he said nothing, and at last she addressed him.

"I know very well what's in your mind," she said.

"Do what you list. I don't care. I'd thank you."

"Would you—you that could marry him? Do you hate him so much?"

"I'm speaking of myself—not him. I hate myself. I hate myself for living—living dust I be. How much did you hear me say to your mother, Michael?"

"One word."

"He told me about it, hoping that I might comfort her."

"He told you hoping that you'd comfort him."

"He was wrong enough either way."

"You ax me what I heard. Only this much: the word 'murderess' lifted against my mother. An' it struck you down, for you toppled over so soon as you'd spoke it; an' I hoped you was dead—to save trouble. But you comed to. Then my first thought was to rid the world of you."

"I saw the thought. Why for don't you do the thing?"

"What did you say to her afore I comed?"

"I told her that if strength was in my bones, I'd go to Okehampton this night an' give her up."

"Do you want me to strangle you, woman?"

"I think I do, Michael."

"Your voice tells me more than your speech," he said calmly. "You come from the presence of my mother no more than the scantle an' shadow of yourself. You couldn't do it. Not after hearing her pray to you to do it."

"She did. How little I knowed about her — or any knowed. She'd bless me an' pray rivers of prayer for me, if I gave her up."

"How could you sink to such a damned thought? Who be a wisp of a girl like you to stand up against her?"

"Ax her. What a sad, wonderful woman! 'Tis an awful thing to believe all she believes."

"Don't pity her. I'd kill you, or any creature, like a fly, for that alone. She's above pity. She's a great woman — such as you'll find in Scripture. Ban't for trash like common folk to pity the likes of she."

"I'm crawling out of her sight so fast as I can. I can't do more. If I love any living soul, 'tis your mother."

"You say so. How am I to know you mean it? You was busy in what didn't concern you, an' dared to try an' torture her. What if you'm foxing me an' mean to slip down the hill when my back's turned?"

"You've only my word for it. Do what you please, if you don't trust me. I'm very willing to die."

"More willing than ready, I reckon. That dregs of a man have brought you to this then?"

"I be nothing to Jesse, an' he never was nothing to me except in his own mind."

"That's true, I'll swear."

"Ban't for you to judge him," she said.

"Out upon him!" he thundered. "Keep his

name off your lips, or you'll tempt me to strike them. 'Tis for me to judge him that would murder my mother. I knowed this would come. It be thrust upon me. The tide of my life has brought it along breast-high. But you? Can I trust you, or can't I?"

"Do as you please. 'Tis all one. You know so well as I whether women can be trusted."

"There's only one woman in the world," he said. "'Tis right I should think high of women, seeing her I live my life with. Your voice tells me what I want to know. You ban't 'feared of me. If you was, you'd be quicker to promise an' call on God. Well, call on Him now—ax Him to blot your name out of the Book of Life, if you be lying. Swear it solemn an' loud, so as I can hear."

"May God Almighty blot my name out of Heaven if ever I tell any living soul what I know about your mother."

"Now go."

They stood beside the 'Nine Stones'—a concourse of granite boulders set in a circle on the Moor by men of old. At this ancient monument Michael parted from her. Neither spoke again, and Salome went forward alone. Turning once to rest upon the hill, she looked back and saw him there—a shadow waiting in the way.

She knew that he would not move until Jesse came to him, but the thought did not quicken her fainting pulses. She only mourned the distance that separated her from sleep. A sensation overtook her that she had dropped out of the thread of certain lives. Their texture henceforth would be spun without her. The interests of her own existence terminated with this exclusion, and she felt that as a spectator only would

she stand and watch the sequel. Activity was denied. Her part had been played to the end. She wondered what Ann Redvers might do.

Concerning her present attitude towards Michael's mother, Salome had spoken the truth. Anger was dead or asleep; pity remained with her, and the pity blossomed to love. She had no strength to trace, no understanding to follow the complex contraventions and agreements of the brain that finally brought her to this end. But memory and circumstance and Salome's own nature, led hither at the last. She stood before the sure fact that Ann had also loved Anthony — had loved him too well to yield one hair of his head to any other woman. Here was a bond between them. From hate against Ann because she had killed him, Salome's logic turned towards love for her, because she had killed him. The magnitude of the wife's devotion appeared in the magnitude of her sacrifice. Only giant affections have power to work such giant deeds. From her standpoint of passion, she began to regard Ann as Michael did from his standpoint of love.

Salome fell into dreaming, and her slow footsteps dragged along the road. She was living deep in the past when a man stopped her, and Jesse's arms came round her. They met just beyond Belstone, upon the common where twin pools reflected the shining sky amid banks of furze. The hour was now late, and only a few windows shone beneath the moonlit thatch and slate of the village.

"What a long, long night this has been!" he said. "Yet I've not found it a sorrow, despite such loneliness. I knowed right well — at least, I thought I knowed. You've spoke to my mother?"

"Yes."

"I'll see you back home now."

"No, I don't want you. I've spoke. Ax her to tell you what I said. I went to curse her, but ——"

"To curse her? To curse my poor mother? Good God!—then the fit comes over you again that I saw before! But what—why? What madness are you telling?"

"And I have cursed her. I've cursed my heart tired. I cursed myself into a fit o' fainting, and she restored me. But I wish I had died rather. Sick—sick of the world an' all in it, be I."

He was bewildered and shocked before this news.

"Why for did you go, then, if you couldn't forgive an' mourn for such a grief as hers? What right had you to stand and speak before her, if not the sacred right of a pitying soul? Shall I never understand any human being except my mother? Be she the only one whose way is always clear to me? An' you to say harsh things! Oh, Salome, is there no gentleness in your maiden heart?"

The adjective reminded her of all he knew not.

"Well may you wonder, poor wretch," she said. "I forgot you in this storm. I forgot that you didn't know. Man, I had to curse or burst my brain. An' now I'd be glad to die for her, if I could."

"Thank God you feel so at last."

"Don't do that. Better stick to it that God's nought. There's no God to help you anyway. Listen, an' hear the wicked trick I put on you, the lie I acted to rob you of your poor savings for my father. Why, I could no more marry you than—I was your father's mistress—his own—his jewel. An' yet this ban't the she that Anthony loved. That girl died when he did. Now you know, poor doating Jesse. Forget me, an' let me get out of your sight for ever."

"Unsay it—unsay it! 'Tis death, Salome."

"Don't shout. Go your way an' forget a woman that's treated you very wickedly. I don't ax you to forgive."

Her message spread outward from his brain and moulded his features into horror under her eyes.

"Well may your hair stand on end," she said. "Best not try to think of all it means — else there'll be an end of your mind once and for all. Take this for your comfort: I'll say nothing. I've promised that, and won't break from it. I've seen to-day with your mother's eyes. I'll keep her secret."

"It's death," he repeated again and again. "Death — death for me."

"Think only of yourself to the last," she answered bitterly.

Then, turning, she went quickly onward into the night, and the high banks of a lane swallowed her. He too began to move; but soon he stopped and stood absolutely helpless without a spark of volition. For a time he only existed mechanically. He hung over a gate and stared out on a mangold field, where the moon shone bright in a sea of lush foliage. Here he drooped, as limp and motionless as though crucified to the bars of the gate. A hurricane beat down upon him, and presently the stricken spirit of the man emerged, as a foundering ship looms dark before sinking from the white squall that has destroyed her. It took him not long to know that his days were done. No power existed to cut this knot. Heaven itself could only be another place of torment for one who possessed his knowledge. He was glad now that he believed in nothing beyond; because only the thought of swift and everlasting extinction kept him sane.

For a stronger soul the position had been shocking enough. To this youth the tragedy of his existence

now paralysed all centres of thought and feeling. Thus in every hour of every day and every night, uncounted human creatures writhe like severed worms under the spade of chance. There was no escape, no contrivance — natural or supernatural — by which this tragic concatenation might be healed. And the man supposed that all had sprung out of his own nature. He had borne an abortion. Jesse perceived how true he had been to himself; and, as a thing outside himself, he now loathed himself with frantic loathing — down to the very flesh that, with it, carried his infirmities of mind. He reeled before the full thought of what he had done. Sweat dropped off his face. Every physical sign of the darkest, dreadfulest grief and horror that a human heart can bear, showed itself in his countenance, his body, and the deep and laboured heaving of his breast.

The paroxysm passed and left him calmer. Old inherent tricks of mind and the sceptic genius of his nature asserted themselves for the last time with him. He began seeking for the key of this destiny, and inquired almost coldly why life had proved so hard a thing that fate called him thus to end it while yet he was young. What crime had he committed? What was its name? Was sin mingled with it? Was this meridian of horror scaled by sustained wickedness in himself? Had he reached to such black climax and culmination by the work of his own evil hands? And if not so, how came it that a soul guiltless must be harried out of life by this appalling crash of events? There was no room for a swift, loving, watching God here. His own mouth had destroyed him, and no power in the universe but death existed that could have saved him from the consequences of being born. Thus, by roads remote, this man's Christian mother and him-

self arrived at an identical goal and resting place. He accepted the solution and rose and faced death.

Once, as he walked onward, he thought of Salome and pictured her heart. For a moment he loathed her; then he considered her secret agonies and the daily price of her lie. His endearments had been punishment enough for her. He marvelled how she suffered without screaming the scourge of his kisses. The manifold mysteries of her were explained at last. He thought of her wild words at their mock betrothal; then he forgot the action and his mind was concerned with the scene of it. In the quarry he would die. Such a death demanded no sustained resolution. Let him but give himself to the air, and nature would do the rest for him. Not a shadowy straw remained to cling to on earth. He had already fallen into a spiritual obit, and his physical extinction would be but a mimicry and burlesque of the more terrific death. He prepared to depart thankfully, and for the first time in his life understood what it is to feel no fear of the end. Natural instincts of self-preservation were numbed and crushed. Not all the ingenuity of Heaven could make life a thing to desire longer. He only yearned to go out of it, to take his sharp opiate swiftly and win everlasting slumber.

As he thought upon this, his steps lengthened and he began to breast the hill out of Belstone. But suddenly he heard himself called and, looking back, saw that Salome had come after him. He hesitated before listening again to her, then retraced his way until they met.

"Jesse," she said, "I had to turn, when I remembered. If you go on, you'll fall in with a man waiting for you by 'Nine Stones.' 'Tis Michael. You'm but dust before his might."



"He knows I have told you? Would that I had been a steadfast fool like him! Then these things could never have come upon me. Brains—brains, that turn addled the moment the east wind of the world blows upon 'em! Better far to have none. Good-bye, Salome. Thank you for this thought. I'll spare Michael that."

"I've ruined your life."

"Not you. All my own work. I forgive you your little share. You've paid for it. Now I must pay too. We've played our appointed parts. No God ever planned nought more mean an' damnable. Good-bye—good-bye, Salome. To-morrow I shall be far from here. But I'll not trouble Michael. Let him bide wi' the 'Nine Stones' an' make 'em ten, poor chap. An' forgive me. You must do that. I didn't know—I didn't know you was a thing apart—sacred. Don't think of me to hate me, for I didn't know."

"'Tis the true word. He's the sacred thought—the only sacred thought I ever get—sacred for us both, Jesse. Thinking of him may make me a better woman, an' you a wiser man—some day."

She held out her hand to him, but he shook his head and left her.

She watched him mount the hill and knew that she would never see him again.

Jesse disappeared from her sight. Then he turned down to the valley of Oke and crossed the river at the stepping-stones beneath Watchett Hill Farm.

His thoughts were full of Michael as he avoided him. In his mind he saw him waiting; and then the elder brother stood still before another aspect of this event. Here, if ever, free will stared him in the face. It was absolutely in his power to make or mar a

murderer. He might leave his blood upon Michael's head, or let him pass innocently onwards. But the voices of the night mocked him. Michael was a murderer already. He had thought upon his brother to slay him; and his soul was red if his hands were clean.

Jesse wondered at the terrific force of character that must be necessary to kill a fellow-being. To take one's own life seemed a trivial deed contrasted with the destruction of another. He hurried to his death, but put it from his mind until he came to it. Through Halstock woods he climbed and presently stood upon the path that crossed the head of the quarry. His haste had rendered him breathless, and he stopped a moment where the moon rained into the forest and gloom and light, mingling, spread heavily under the silence of sleeping trees.

Then, from the path behind him, there leapt up the noise of firm feet that moved with speed.

He listened, smiled at the sky and spoke to himself.

"Him! An' after all I know, I could still dream of my will being free, an' think that 'twas for me to say whether he should do it or not!"

## CHAPTER X

‘FORGIVE ME, ALL!’

**J**ESSE REDVERS stood fifty yards from the point where the footpath traversed the quarry-head. Southward the way bent suddenly, and now, like one enchanted, the man waited while invisible feet came nearer. But the figure that presently swept towards him was not Michael's. A woman hastened forward, and Jesse recognised his mother. Her purpose he did not divine, but imagined that she had come to him.

Ann Redvers indeed was thinking on her elder son, though she little dreamed of his presence. As he suddenly appeared, she was startled and amazed to see him.

When Michael left her and took Salome from Harter, Ann, for the first time since her husband's death, had found the way lie clearly before her. She did not doubt that Salome would keep her word; and between the alternatives of arrest and surrender there seemed no question. Her personal instinct was also toward the latter course, and she believed that even Michael must support her in such a conclusion. She wrote a swift letter to him, but not trusting him, chose the less frequented road through Halstock Wood, so that none should overtake her or alter her plan.

Leaving the letter where he must find it on his return, she went to her room, changed her clothes, put on her best black gown and bonnet. Then followed

leave-taking. She went out of Harter under the moon and believed that she would see the home of her wedded life, the cradle of her children, no more. If any emotion touched her at the moment, it was not grief. Her way led above the broom patch, and Salome came uppermost in her thoughts. She calculated the age of the girl at that time, and marvelled.

A sense of freedom got hold upon her. Her heart threw off its anguish at every step. Then she forgot her own escape and thought of Jesse and grew sad. Perhaps he had paid the price of her soul. She passed into the netted silver of the forest and moved slowly along to save her dress from the thorns and briars that intruded upon the path. Only Jesse and his future were in her thoughts, when suddenly she saw him at the bend of the track and marked him start, turn his back upon her and hasten on before.

As he hurried away, an instinct told him that he might fly from her, but that from Michael he would not have fled. His mother cried out to him.

“Jesse — Jesse — is it you, Jesse?”

And he answered without stopping.

“Yes, mother, ’tis me. Don’t ax me to hold back. I must do it now. If you be seeking peace, so be I too.”

For a moment she supposed that he was upon her own errand. She had not yet fully measured what this catastrophe must mean to Jesse, because she was ignorant that Salome had seen him and told him all the truth.

“Bide — then ; bide for me. The door’s opened at last — I can do it now.”

He turned, stopped and held up his hand.

“Hold back !” he said. “My road I go alone —

after father. 'Twas only my evil fortune that kept me from it long, long since. I knowed at bottom of my heart I'd follow him. Betwixt them they've done for me, and I be glad to go."

Now she understood and cried aloud as she strove to overtake him.

"For love of me, Jesse! Don't make me suffer no more."

"Not I. I've made you suffer enough. Go back to Michael, mother."

He stood beside the rail at the top of the quarry. Then he vaulted over and passed between the trunks of the young trees there and felt his way to the brink. He heard Ann panting close at hand.

"Good-bye, dear mother. Forgive me, all!" he cried.

Then, rather than leap off, he let himself down over the edge where, like curls, the silver roots of trees twisted naked on the forehead of the precipice. Holding by these, he slid downward, then lowered himself to the last. It bent and snapped.

His mother, standing above, heard the noise of her son's body against the quarry floor. She shrieked so that night shivered; but no answer came.

For a moment she listened, and the echoes grew still. Then she cried his name again and began to climb down through the wood. Within the quarry it was dark, and for some time she sought fruitlessly. But at last she found him, and the heap of him seemed small. She lifted his head and held it to herself. He was insensible, but she could not be sure whether he might not still live. Her thoughts moved quickly and she knew that if a throb of life remained, it was vital that Jesse should at once be tended. She could think of no nearer helping point than Watchett Hill Farm, and,

propping her son so that he should lie straight with his head a little raised, she left him and hastened back through the night-hidden valley. Her road was difficult in the darkness, but she went swiftly and planned how the people at Watchett Hill should help her. Her mind missed out Salome from these musings, but she decided that Barbara should return with her to Jesse, that the boy Lethbridge should mount, gallop off, rouse Belstone and then hurry on for a doctor. The helplessness of the position and the hours that must probably pass before any aid could reach the quarry, filled Ann Redvers with despair.

Gasping and suffering from a great palpitation of heart, she crossed the river, at last climbed the hill and reached the door of the farm. With all her might she hammered upon it, and not until the reverberation echoing from stone passage and wall fell cold upon her ear, did she remember that the Westaways had departed and the place was empty.

Trembling from her speed, bruised where she had fallen, wet to the knees, torn with thorns, frantic with the thought of her mangled flesh in the valley beneath, she fell back and for a moment sank down physically powerless. A feline cry of joy sounded and a great grey cat that had struggled back to its old home again from the cottage at Church Hill Cross, rubbed its head against her and purred thanksgivings and padded upon her dress. Round about stood the lines of sentry men—like spirits of soldiers that mustered here from some slain legion to answer the roll call of the dead. Shoulder to shoulder they glittered under the moon. Motionless, watchful, they accented the silence but banished the peace of the midnight hour. Only the soulless house seemed dead. The shadow people were alive and alert.

Ann rose presently and proceeded up the hill. She intended now to go to William Arscott and demand his aid ; but that happened on the crown of the high ground above Belstone that changed her plan ; for she found Michael there.

Weary of waiting by the Nine Stones, he had at last proceeded towards Belstone. Ann met him returning home.

"Over the quarry!" he cried. "God, mother — Then the man's made rags and bones of hisself! 'Tis a sixty foot drop or more."

"Arscott," she said. "Rouse him an' others. Do what's to do. There may be hope. Be swift, Michael. You'll find me along with him when you come."

He did not answer, but hurried back to the village, while she turned, retraced her way, and made all the speed that she could down the hill, over the river, back by the glen of Oke.

Jesse Redvers lay exactly as she had left him. Some creature rushed from his side as she approached, and presently from the wood a fox barked.

His body still seemed warm to her ; his face and hands were cold. She felt for his heart-beat, but could not mark it. Then she pillowed his head on her bosom and put her arms round him and waited.

An hour passed before lights glimmered below and men shouted for guidance and came tramping with wave and flash of lanterns. Arscott and three labourers first appeared ; then Michael arrived on a horse that he had borrowed at Belstone ; and soon afterwards Doctor Blight galloped up.

He could only tell them what all knew.

"Dead — quite dead. He must have died at once, poor fellow — quite painless. His neck is broken."

"Like his father afore him," said William Arscott.

Each man set about the action proper to the time. Michael conducted his mother home and, hours later, after the moon had set and while yet it was very dark, the dead came back to Harter.



## CHAPTER XI

### THE WALK TO OKEHAMPTON

UPON the day after Jesse Redvers sank into the earth beside his father, Ann prevailed with her son, and he yielded. The tragedy of his brother's death went far to influence him, and while he did not pretend much to mourn it, the religious significance of this suicide deeply impressed Michael. Such a death could not be passed over with indifference. He felt that Jesse had not done amiss to die and that his end became him; but then rose the question of the right or wrong of it. As he grew older this man's mother enlarged in him.

He was shaken by these events, and, during moments of uncertainty, Ann had her way.

Eternity came closer to Michael now that his father and brother had both passed onward into it. Even more pregnant than his mother's prayers was Jesse's death. For whither had he gone? Ann Redvers stated a new argument as she and her son talked deep into the night that followed the funeral.

"You've done nought to forfeit your Saviour's grace, Michael; and so we may hope for you that after this storm called life be blown out, you'll go to your eternal home. Doan't 'e want me there, boy? Can't 'e see that you'm shutting the door against your mother? Let me end this long, long-drawn death. For death it is, even while I'm holding your dear hand. Let

poor Jesse speak for me. Let your father speak for me, Michael."

She argued with him until the day broke; and at dawn he gave way.

"Be it as you will," he said. "I yield to 'e. You've done what no angel nor devil, nor God's self could do. Come—come this instant moment, afore I gather strength from the sunlight, an' fight for 'e again, an' go back on my word. Come! Quick—now— afore the world's awake to see a son do this damned thing!"

Within an hour they were upon their road to Okehampton; and having passed the head of the quarry—for Michael decreed that they should go that way—there came to them Salome. She was walking to the railway station.

Ann bade her son go forward out of earshot and then addressed the other woman.

"'Twas a kind act of the Lord to send you this day," she said, "for I wanted to bid you good-bye an' make my peace with you."

"Tis for me to make peace, not you. I've brought a dreadful chapter of horror into your days—a darkness difficult to breathe or see in. I ax your pardon for the words of my evil tongue, Ann Redvers, and for this death. My work—my work. Heaven will never blame the man. For what was there for him to do but die, when his eyes were opened?"

"I know that Christ will beg His Father for my son, Salome. And for us—'tis for each in the land of the living to labour on till the night comes. Life is to be lived—mine, how short God knows—yours, how long He knows too. I pray you from my soul to be good, Salome. Think of Jesse. He broke away from the faith. He believed nought; an' the blame wasn't all

his. A part I shared. His love for me stood between him an' his duty. Michael be in the same case. Souls are a hidden subject to the young. Make your peace with God, woman, for you have an awful heavy load for such a girl's shoulders. Trust Him; go back to Him. He saw the likes of you enter into Heaven. Never forget that."

"You talk to me as if you was on your death-bed — or as if I was, Ann Redvers. Why do you say these things now?"

"Because I'm going to give myself up. Oh, if I could but share the content in my heart with you! It makes spring of all this wintry earth, an' summer out of the dead leaves falling."

"But Michael?"

"His heart be in the hand of his God. 'Tis softened, kneaded to my year-long prayers. Jesse's death have done more than Jesse's life could ever do."

Salome had not reached this standpoint of thought, and now she rebelled violently against any such decision.

"No — no — no!" she cried fiercely. "Not that — not that! Don't end it that awful way. Haven't I done enough? Haven't you endured enough? You — a woman in ten thousand. Think of me too — think of me — you that think of all, to the last little new-born baby. Think of me going on living, an' knowing for evermore that 'twas my bloody work forced this upon you."

"Hush! He'll hear you crying. Do 'e think what looks so grim to you be grim to me? Do 'e think I haven't dreamed o' the punishment an' waked with tears of thankfulness for death — only to find 'twasn't there? Then have I sunk from hope to despair, an' wept live water of misery instead of the phantom tears of joy. What can they do that'll make my heart beat

quicker than it done when Jesse died, or when Michael gave in to me? Wait—wait, Salome, till you've growed older. Then you'll outlive the thought an' desire of this life as easy as the thought of a cast-off gown. My heart goes out to 'e now—to you an' my brave, broken Michael. There's things he don't know, an' never must. Only Jesse knowed who you was; an' that because you told him. Henceforth there's but two in this world ever shall: you an' me. I've thought long an' loving upon your past an' your future. An' I've decided so. Your sins be a part of mine."

"I own to no sins beyond the sin of killing Jesse."

"More fool you, poor girl. You'll see the others presently. Let God but come into your heart. He'll do the rest. Jesse didn't die for nought. He didn't love you for nought neither. Lives coil into each other like the links of a chain, an' if we could see deep enough, we should know none, but trusted to all the others. 'Tis their numbers that hold the ears of corn standing stout against the weather; 'tis their numbers that keep the little bees warm in the butt. Man's part is to make common cause against the wild weather of evil, Salome. The strength of the race be stronger than the ills of the race—stronger than sin—stronger than death."

Salome only knew that each step took Ann nearer to her personal doom.

"If you won't heed me, then heed Michael," she said. "He'll come back to his steadfast mind afore he sees the end of this."

Before the elder could stop her, she had lifted her voice and called out.

"Michael! Come here, will 'e?"

The man turned and walked without words beside them.

"Is this good — is it a rightful thing?" asked Salome with choking voice. "Is it what your brother died for? Oh, Michael, can you do this?"

He looked at her, as one might glance at a flower after gazing upon the mountain that bore it.

"'Tis done," he said. "'Tis finished. Not ten million other men or women could have done it. But mother could. Maybe 'tis the hardest, cruellest task that ever God A'mighty called a son to, Salome. But I've come to do it — for her."

"Is it right?"

"You — you poor, little, misty-eyed thing! You to ax the question — like the seaweed axing the sea if 'tis right to sink the ship! Yes, 'tis right. Nothing happens that ban't right in the bird's-eye view of my mother's God. For He orders it all. Jesse was right to make away with himself; I'm right to make away with mother. She's said it. She knows."

A depth below despair marked his words. He took his mother's hand and drew her on.

"Good-bye, Salome," said Ann. "God be with you."

But the younger could not answer. She watched them depart, then blindly went her way.

And in the moment of her own consolation the mother's heart brimmed over for Michael. She tried very hard to comfort and support him; but he would not speak. Once she stopped to address a friend at a cottage door; and he roughly ordered her to come on.

## CHAPTER XII

### A VISITOR FOR JOSHUA BLOOM

**T**HROWN ashore by the world's indifferent wave, his fears realised, his struggles over and his balance of days assured, Mr. Bloom pursued the thread of life in Okehampton Workhouse and surveyed the past from that standpoint.

Joshua had choice between picking oakum and breaking stones, and he chose the latter task as more congenial, and less tainted with the suggestion of prison. When his health and the weather allowed it, he spent a good deal of time with other old men in the stone-yard; but his philosophy added little brightness to these ancient lives.

To him on a mild afternoon near Christmas there came a visitor, and the squat figure and genial countenance of Joseph Westaway appeared where the quarryman worked at a heap of road metal. Mr. Bloom showed considerable gratification at this compliment. He rose from his sack, took off the spectacles that protected his eyes, dropped his hammer and shook hands.

"This be a civil act in you, flock-master," he said, "an' I feel it according. Come round here, please. Then us can sit down out of earshot of they paupers. I'm sure I'm very glad to see you; an' clever in health too, by the looks of it?"

"So I be," declared old Westaway. "I've a great deal to be thankful for; an' first of all that my stomach

does its duty so steady as a old horse ploughing. The nation may turn upside down; but nothing daunts my innards, thank God."

Mr. Bloom nodded.

"An' I might say the same. Only they takes damn good care not to strain the digestion here. Not that I blame anybody. The food be wholesome. At this moment we'm in a great excitement — a regular up-store — for there's to be a bit of a spread at Christmas, with a drop of drink to it. 'Twas fought out by the board of directors in council assembled, we hear. The question was if us old blids should have a pint of small ale apiece, an' a nip of cordial after the banquet, or whether us should not. Us have all been in a fever about it, for there's a good few teetotalers in high places. But it's gone right. We are to have the liquor."

"I'm very glad indeed. A proper thing to warm the heart at Christmas. I will say you're bearing up well, Josh. There's less of the old hang-dog look in your eyes, though your mouth runs same as usual, I see."

"I was right, all the same. Here I be; an' my sisters likewise."

"Yes, here you be. An' 'tis not so bad as you thought, seemingly?"

"Here an' there 'tis worse; here an' there 'tis better. But don't suppose I like it. 'Tis a very great proof of failure in a man to come to this at the last."

"Yet in a sense you'm nearer Heaven than outside, Josh; for all be equal here; an' none of you want no money; an' there's no marrying nor giving in marriage."

"All to the good, I grant you," said Mr. Bloom; "but as to money, man wants it everywhere so long as he draws breath. 'Tis a power even in this place."

"For my part, 'twas always a difficult problem with me, for all that I had the handling of very large sums. I've often astonished a common soul, who thought me his equal, by telling him that I've signed a cheque for fifty-two pound in my time."

"You was a squanderer, Westaway — you can't deny it."

"Far from that — far from that, Joshua. Not much over the Bible tenth did I part from year in, year out. We that are well-to-do — I mean we that was well-to-do — we can't see starvation staring us in the face an' pass it by. I've got a copper here an' there yet for a poor neighbour, thank the Lord; an' a bit of ground for myself too, for that matter."

"Ground was always your besetting sin."

"Not at all. I was brought up by my faither to take the earth in a high spirit; an' I have. If you stand in one corner of my garden an' look south of east, the place seems quite considerable. But, betwixt you and me an' the gate-post, there's not half an acre all told, an' the apples be no use. Still, good ground an' a very fine root comes out of it."

"You'll surely never pay off all they tradesmen?"

"To the last penny; an' interest added too. Ars-cott took my life insurance by the law. I'm free of him."

Mr. Bloom interrupted with great bitterness.

"That man — that man's my thorn even here! My only prayer is that I may outlive him an' hear tell of an awful end to the beast. What d'you think he done? When first end I came here, he let me have sixpence a week by way of pension for fifty years of service."

"Sixpence! You make my blood run cold to hear you, Joshua."

"Ess; an' I'll make it run hot again, if you'll listen.



After two months of it—that was four an' fourpence—he changed his mind for some private, devilish reason, an' knocked it off. There's a man! Like a cat with a mouse, I call it. 'Tis only the Almighty in Heaven has any right to play with a poor creature so."

"It ill becomes him. 'Tis most indecent," declared old Joseph solemnly. "Sometimes I've even thought he was hard on me, too. But the law allows it. However, there must be a reckoning. Be sure of that. These things can't be done without due payment."

"So I should hope. May I live to see his pay-day, that's all."

There was a brief silence between them; then Mr. Westaway spoke.

"The ways of God are slow or swift, according to the requirements of the case; but nothing is missed. A time for everything, an' everything in its own time with Him. Have 'e heard the verdict?"

"Whether they be going to hang Ann Redvers or not? No. Us was talking of it—me an' a few old men—yesterday. Then up came the question of the Christmas beer an' made us forget lesser things. Be the judgment out?"

"'Twas sent by telegraph to parson at Belstone yesterday, just before three o'clock in the afternoon. The jury, though they understood 'twas murder, showed very great sympathy with her an' fetched it in manslaughter. The judge knowed it was murder, however, an' in the upshot he have ordained that she must do twenty years' penal servitude."

"Ah! an' her up forty year old. Well, that'll only fetch her into the sixties afore she's free again. That's nought. An' a chap here awhile ago was saying how the prisoners have better food than we paupers. A crying disgrace to the kingdom, if true."

"You shouldn't look at life so much through your own spectacles, Joshua," said Mr. Westaway. He had grown rosy and rather indignant.

"Perhaps not. I'm very sorry for her, of course. 'Twas a far-reaching tragedy. Did t'other woman's name come up in argument? I lay she've found the newspapers pretty reading of late."

"It didn't come out, though 'tis said one here an' there knows it. She've had her wormwood, no doubt, poor creature. They rumour 'twas a widow to Sourton."

"That unknown female's the most interesting thing about the tale. To think as a nameless, scarlet woman can be thrown into a family, like a cannon-ball, to play the mischief with such a lot of respectable people! To think of one frail sister killing off a generation, an' altering the face of Nature, an' doing fate's work, an' making meat for the grave an' the gallows! To think of such as her opening the gate of hell to people as I'd have bet a week's wages was safe for glory! An' I'll dare swear she goes to church to this day with the best of 'em, an' smiles at the males, like Jezebel afore her."

"It shows that faith in God be our only hold when such mysteries tumble in upon us," answered old Joseph. "Redvers! That noisy soul, as whistled all day long an' laughed for nought, like a woodpecker on the wing. Who would guess now that the lusts of the flesh could alter a man's nature an' turn the simple cunning?"

"Not so cunning neither. His wife wormed it out, you see."

"Only a common man inside his many inches; an' not a partickler good one seemingly — to throw a stone at the dead, knowing oneself no better, but only wicked in a different pattern. Yet this I will say: a human

built of comfortabler mud than Anthony I never did know. As kind a heart, as quick a turn for gentleness an' generosity, I cannot call to mind. It warmed me to meet with him in the coldest weather."

"Did aught come out about Jesse? My thought was that very like Ann Redvers knowed more about her son's downfall than she cared to tell."

"I do wish you'd look at your fellow-creatures more charitable, Joshua. You vex me," declared Mr. West-away. "You leave the mercy of Heaven too much from your outlook. You forget that God's all-heeding, an' all-forgiving, an' everywhere."

"Maybe He is," admitted Bloom; "but I ban't—not now. That's why I've missed Him of late, perhaps. All the same, you'm wrong. No member of Christianity was ever stauncher than me. Nought drives me from Him. Twice a Sunday to church still, though 'tis a white jacket I go in. I won't be choked off glory, no more than Job would be. As to this tale, 'tis told, an' the parties that are left have got to go on living their lives. How is it with Michael Redvers? Do he bide at Harter?"

"No; he's off. 'Tis him my heart ached for. His mother seemed uplifted and went to her doom as steadfast as a good man dies. But him—I can't bear to think of him while he was still in doubt. It makes my glasses misty to think of that young youth waiting to hear. Thank God it's over now an' he knows the worst."

A bell rang, and Mr. Bloom rose.

"Mustn't stop no more," he said; "but I take it very kindly in you to come and have words with a forlorn man such as me; an' if you'll do the like, just now an' again when in Okehampton, you'll be none the worse an' me all the better."

"I'll come," said Mr. Westaway, "an' glad shall I be to do it. There, I was forgetting. I fetched 'e a packet of tobacco, Josh, for 'tis a great soother, and for my part I've found it stand by me well during these revolutions. 'Tis even an aid to religion in my opinion, an' very likely sent for that purpose."

Bloom took the gift gratefully.

"You'm an old fool to think of other people like you do. All the same, I bless you for it, though whether my blessing be good to benefit man or mouse, is a question."

"Anyway, 'tis the best you can do, as the crab tree said, when the boy bit the apple an' made a face. A blessing be a blessing, an' I thank you, Bloom."

"You'm a lesson in your simple, soft way, no doubt," declared Joshua. "Now I'm going to my tea. Sorry I can't ax you to have a dish; but I can't, so all's said. However, you'll come again, won't 'e?"

Mr. Westaway promised to do so, and the old men parted with shaking of hands.

## CHAPTER XIII

### AT CHURCH HILL CROSS

ON an October evening, when the year declined gently through sinking cadences of bird music to silence, and by fading harmonies of colour into death, there came a man and knocked at a cottage door near Church Hill Cross, by Belstone.

Red leaves flickered from a cherry tree that stood against the face of the little dwelling, and they were the highest note of brightness struck by that scene; for the hour shone silver-grey; thatched eaves and whitewashed walls, together with all things round about them, answered to the sobriety of the time. It was a subdued moment of near horizons. For a while rain had damped the torch of Autumn, and amid her jewelled pomps and processions of golden days, there went this one, grey as the mist, gentle, resigned and patient.

A woman answered the man's knocking, and she wrinkled her face and looked up into his eyes. Then memory recognised him and she smiled, flushed, and held out her hand.

"If it isn't! Michael — Mr. Redvers, I should say."

"No, no. Michael to you, Barbara."

"Whatever be you doing in these parts?"

"Comed down for a day or two to look at our graves an' see they'm vitty. How's your sister? Us was truly sorry to hear tell of your trouble; but he'd lived to ripeness."

"Come in," she said. "You'll stop supper, I do hope. The whole world be altered since last us met. Ess, our old dear have gone home — fourteen months now. How ever long is it since us seed you, Michael?"

"Just short of ten year, Barbara."

"I hope your mother be very well?"

"Very well, thank you."

"An' what be you doing, if I may ax?"

The question appeared to surprise him.

"What should I be doing? Waiting — that's all. Five more year. What a woman — eh, Barbara? Think of it! She've got every good mark 'twas possible for her to get! She burns there, like a wax candle among dips. The people to prison bless her name. Every good mark she could get!"

He beamed at the thought and sat down on the chair she dusted and placed for him. Then he looked round and perceived that he had been shown into a little parlour.

"Not here," he said. "Ban't friendly. Let me come in the kitchen an' smoke my pipe while you go about your work. Where's Salome to?"

"She'll be back along presently. She'm in Belstone. We just live here together an' do very well. After faither died, us cut down they old, scrimped-up apple trees in the garden. We take in washing an' needle-work. Quite a lot comes our way, I'm glad to tell you."

He looked at her.

"You'm not changed to name," he said.

She smiled and shook her head.

"More inside than out."

"Never thought of marrying?"

"Thought of it, yes; never committed it."

"Busy Billy goes his old way?"

"Yes—a very successful man by all accounts. Reads the lessons to church Sundays now."

"An' Salome single likewise?"

She nodded. Then certain ideas linked together in his mind and he spoke again.

"Our graves be very nice—all so smooth an' suent. Them in the pit would thank you if they could. For I know 'tis you should be thanked."

"Me an' Salome—there she is."

The latch lifted and Barbara's sister entered. She was not surprised, but she smiled, and an afterglow of the old, delicious sweetness hovered upon her lips.

"Wish you good evening, Michael. I heard tell you was in Belstone."

"An' he'm going to stop to supper," said Barbara.

"An' more than welcome. I hope Mrs. Redvers be well?"

"I'll tell you all about her—all," answered the man. "For that matter I'm come to do it."

His countenance brightened at his mother's name as of yore. He began immediately to repeat the things he had said to Barbara.

Salome looked silently into his great, strong, simple face. Presently she spoke.

"An' how is it with you yourself, Michael?"

"I be with a farmer in sight of the prison. I work hard too, for it shortens the days; an' I see her at the appointed hours."

"'Twas like you to think of that money. Us never said all us felt in writing. We'm poor hands at a pen—me an' Barbara."

"Don't name it again. Little enough."

"But it very near cleared him afore he went. He knowed the last penny was only a question of months."

"An' passed peaceful, no doubt — such a peaceful old chap as him?"

"He went sudden, but easy enough. The last month he'd just sit wi'out speech an' chew over the cud of his thoughts in the garden."

"I wish I'd knowed what a few more pounds would have done. A pity he didn't die feeling he'd paid all."

"'Twas as good as paid. Just afore he went, he kept on at Sally to go back to church again; but his last words of all was 'twenty shilling in the pound.' He may have said something after, but we couldn't catch it."

"Mr. Arscott comed to see him six months before he died," said Salome; and her sister took up the narrative, as a hungry dog snatches a bone.

"Devil! An' why for, do 'e think? To get him to put money in a company as Arscott was making out of his stoneworks! 'You'll have plenty in a minute when I'm gone an' the insurance falls in,' faither told him. To see the man look out of his little pig's eyes! 'Twas all inside the law an' justice,' he said. An' faither answered, 'I know it, William; I've never spoke a word against you.'"

"'Man plans — God spans.' That was dear faither's little bit of wisdom latterly. He often got comfort from it," murmured Salome.

But Michael's thoughts were with Mr. Arscott.

"I heard a good thing against him to the 'Hearty Welcome,'" he said. "It seems he've been shooting game under another man's license this year — just a dirty little Arscott trick, that. But they caught him out an' fined him last week. I lay somebody smarted afterwards!"

They talked long of the past, and of the dead and living. But Michael always drifted back to his mother



and her life in prison. At the end of fifteen years from the beginning of her punishment she would be free. Then she and her son intended to take a farm in Yorkshire.

"Mother must have a large outlook in her eyes and a wild moor to breathe on, because she be used to it all her life. She must have the clean, sharp air she likes. So we be going up-along where 'tis cold and hard. I'd got a thought for Canada through meeting a man who knows it. Poor as a coot he went there, an' rich came back after thirty years. He was the sort that gathers money. But mother won't leave England, so 'tis Yorkshire presently. I've spent a bit of time up there an' like the people. Seeing I was a foreigner, they behaved very civil."

"So strong an' single-eyed you be," said Salome; "an' never different. The world was no miz-maze of doubt an' darkness to you through all them awful months! Nothing ever blows you to left or right. You keep straight on, like a wave. What's the secret of it, Michael?"

"Her," he answered. "I just lifted my eyes to her an' went my way — same as your dog looks in your face to know your will — then goes an' does it. Not that I done her will — God forgive me! — long, long I fought. Badly I paid her for her love. A blind, ignorant chap. Still, she forgived me, Salome."

"You was a good son according to your lights," said Barbara; but he contradicted her fiercely, and his great voice rose till the dresser rattled.

"Don't say it; don't dream it! 'Tis far from the truth. I tell you, women, there was never yet a son's goodness as comed near the goodness of a mother. Nature never showed it; Christ's self didn't show it; an' the man who calls himself a good son an' thinks he

be — a vain an' a narrow soul is that man. Though I'm near five-an'-thirty year old, I've never fathomed yet all my mother have done for me."

After supper Michael smoked his pipe and told them many stories of the prison and the life there. Presently conversation turned again upon the past and he uttered a wonder that had often crossed his mind.

"I've thought many a time upon the poor, weak vessel that was led away by father. I meant to ax you, Salome, for only you an' my mother ever knowed her name. Be she dead? Be she going right? Is there anything one might do for her?"

"Nothing. She was just a every-day woman. She's alive for that matter — doing neither good nor harm."

Barbara showed the utmost astonishment.

"My stars, how close you can be, Sally! You to know that great news all these years an' never let it out!"

"I promised Mrs. Redvers last time I seed her not to tell the name, an' I never shall," answered her sister.

"Like mother, that!" said Michael.

"Well, I don't think it was," declared Barbara. "If you ax me, I should have thought her stern mind, that hated to hide evil, would have commanded the female to confess her sins."

"'Twas never no sin in that woman's eyes," said Salome. "No sin — unless undying love be a sin. But, be that as it may, the name will not be known now."

"You may feel very sure my mother advised right," asserted Michael. "Therefore you must keep your promise an' not say one word — not even after the woman dies. You mind that, Salome."

"I shall," she answered.

Barbara brought a bottle of spirits presently, blew the dust off it and poured some out for Michael Redvers.

He smoked and drank until a late hour; then he shook hands with them and departed.

"'Tis a pleasant thing to see you both again," he declared: "an' I'll give mother your messages. Henceforth I shall come down-along once a year to visit you, for we'm bound together in a sort of way. I never knowed mother fond of any woman but you, Salome; an' 'tis a thing you may well be proud of that she was."

He went off into a dark and rainy night, while the sisters stood together under their cherry tree until the sound of his footfall ceased.

"There goeth a good husband wasted," said Barbara. "'Tis almost against nature, such lifelong worship of an old mother."

"I don't know. Jesse used to say — I suppose he'd picked it up somewheres — that nought could happen outside nature — not the worst or the best. 'Nature covers all,' he'd tell me. If 'tis true, then Michael's heart be only another fine thing, like the flowers at river's brink, or the sun on the cloud."

"Wild talk. He knows better now, poor boy. Come in out of the fog. If it ban't midnight! 'Tis a wonder to me what little sleep men-folk can do with."

## CHAPTER XIV

### WINTER DAWN

**E**ARLY on a Christmas morning, while yet it was moonlight and Cosdon's head towered darkly under the stars, there came slow feet to the lych-gate of Belstone Church, and an old man and a sleepy boy proceeded to the vestry door. Rime of frost lay heavy on the earth; the moon shone brightly; two subdued sounds alone broke the intense silence. Taw river murmured in the valley and glittered over its frosty falls, and the old man grumbled to the boy.

"Finger-cold it is. Hold up the lantern, will 'e? How else be I going to get this key in the door?"

Still whining, the sexton entered the church.

"Why for can't us go to the Lord's Table comfortable an' warm after Morning Prayer, like us used to in old parson's time? Who's in a proper spirit of prayer wi' his stomach rumbling an' his limbs all steeved to death wi' cold? 'Twas the Lord's supper once, same as He ordained; but now — Lord knows what it is."

He opened the church, lighted some lamps in the chancel and then clattered to a stove at the west end. The fuel ignited slowly, and the ancient man drew up a hassock and sat down with his hands spread to the warmth.

Presently he took his lantern and entered the bell-chamber, where five ropes depended. He put his foot

in the hold and began to ring the tenor bell. The work warmed him and his breath steamed out.

Aloft the notes rolled with such purity and distinction as frosty air lends to bell music. First the vibrations followed separately until an unbroken flow of them had been established; then they made a sustained murmur of melody, punctuated with throbs as the clapper struck the sound bow.

The alarum roused sleeping women, and many slipped from bed as they heard it. Lights twinkled from upper chambers of the cottages round about. Here and there might have been heard voices of wives who urged their husbands to rise and join them at the sacramental rite; while in some cases entreaty took the form of command. The vicarage blazed with cheerful illumination, and the young vicar's wife was the first to enter church. As she did so, the sleepy-eyed boy stole out with a taper and lighted two candles upon the Lord's table.

A sense of light became manifest in the windows of the church; but it was the moon that shone there. It brooded on the broad planes of the wall; it threw the shades of naked trees into the churchyard; it spread a network of shadows upon the sleeping-places of the dead.

Among the graves some fresh impressions marked the earth, and the silvery filigree of the frost was pressed into a dead whiteness where feet had trodden it.

On the confines of the burial ground two mounds glittered side by side, and two living souls stood above them. Upon each grave the man and woman who waited there had placed a little, round, yellow wreath of the flowers called 'everlasting.' These had been specially manufactured. They were enclosed in glass cases, and one bore the name of 'Anthony' in black

on the yellow ; the other, the name of ' Jesse.' They struck a splash of harsh colour amid the frosted grass-blades and stared up like eyes.

The man flung the paper that had contained these memorials over the churchyard fence. Then he slapped his arms upon his chest, stamped his feet and spoke.

" Stand upon this here stone out of the ice, mother. Will her be long? Ban't good for you to bide here."

" I said just afore six. She's coming, Michael."

The man walked forward and shook hands with another figure that now approached them.

" So it is, sure enough. A happy Christmas to 'e, Salome Westaway. Here she is. Don't you keep her long. We've tramped from Okehampton an' must get back again afore eight o'clock."

Then Michael went apart out of earshot and Salome hurried forward and met Ann. She put out both her hands to hold the other's.

There are utterances sacred to silence and voices beyond all power of sound. Poetry is less than they are ; music's self cannot tell them. Ann looked into the eyes of Salome. Then she stooped and kissed her.

The moon was dying and the stars dimmed their light. Not a cloud obscured the ineffable blue of the zenith, and morning moved behind the Moor.

" Thank you for this, Salome. But I'd fain wish 'twas the bell, not me that brought you."

The other shook her head.

" These here — an' you," she said, pointing to the graves.

" Turn back afore I go, woman. Us can never meet again. 'Tis the last time my eyes will see Belstone an' Harter. We go for good to-morrow. Turn, Salome ! I, that be sixty years, speak to your forty. There's the only road to your peace."

She lifted her arm toward the low mass of the church. Warm fires shone from the windows and moonlight still gilded the roof.

"There are things too small for God to heed, Ann. My broken life is one of them."

"Never—never! All—to the pattern of the frost on these dear graves—be the thought-out invention of our God. Nought's too small for Him, Salome; an' nought's too great. If He's suffered even me—if He's let the candle of hope flicker even yet in my evil heart—how much more you. Be your sad soul a small thing to Him? 'Twas for you the Little Child opened his eyes this day. Oh, believe it—believe it, same as you did when you was young an' happy. Believe there's no darkness on earth that God an' man working together can't turn into light. I've larned that; an' I've larned what God's forgiveness means. Ours be but the shadow of His. He comes three parts of the way. The haste of God, Salome! Quicker'n the lightning. A sigh of sorrow brings Him, or one humble thought. 'Tis enough that our sad eyes be turned to Heaven, for He never misses one upward glance."

"You speak what you know."

"An' what these know. Do it for their sakes, an' for my poor sake too—I, that be like you still: waiting on this side o' death. Go in there now, an' soon your eyes will be opened again. Answer to that bell shouting salvation so strong! Be part of this blessed morning, Salome. Share the first good o' the world."

"My heart turns against it."

"Yet the Table's spread. Will 'e come, if I come with you? I was going to take Sacrament along with Michael presently down to Okehampton, after we'd

seen the sun lift on Harter for the last time, an' said 'good-bye' to Dartymoor; but if you'll come ——"

"No — no — I can't — I won't — not after all these years. It all means nought to me — nought but dust and ashes."

"If you only knowed what would come of it. I know. Take my word. Please to do it, Salome."

"Your life have turned you into a higher sort of being than I can be," said the younger. "By all the long, lone agony you've suffered; by all the years you've paid, you come to rest. 'Tis very different with me. I've got nothing."

"You'm wrong there. The grief an' pain an' years — all a passing show. They didn't make my peace. We can't atone for one evil act — not one. Not a soul of Eve's seed could have seen God, but for the deed of Christ. No payment's possible without His payment. Then think of my shadow of hope against my solid wall of sin. Come back to Christ, Salome, an' remember 'tis in your feeble power to add a note of joy to the herald angels' song this day. Come back an' make the brightness of the breaking morning brighter! Come back, an' glad the spirits of these — these sleeping here. Their hearts be hidden from us; but still they beat in God's own hand."

"Jesse, that died as he died?"

"Nought's too hard for a God, I tell 'e. Once I wouldn't have said that; now I do say it. If He can save us from the Evil One, He can save us from our poor selves. I know that too. 'Tis my sole, fearful hope."

The bell stopped; the light in the church windows grew dim, and the moon ceased to cast shadows. But a pale illumination trembled upon the roofs and walls of the church.



Michael approached them slowly.

"Dawn's broke," he said. "Come, mother."

"Bide a little while yet, dear heart. Oh, Salome — not for all the past us have suffered, but for all the future us may dare to hope. An' if not for me, do it for them."

But the allusion to suffering did more to soften Salome than Ann's appeal to hope.

"For the past, then — yes, an' because he'd have liked me to do all you ask me. An' will you forgive me? Will you say it in words? I'd sooner hear you say it than Heaven."

"Forgive you — yes — as I still can hope to be forgiven. An' you've said it — you've promised?"

"Since he'd have willed it so, and since you ax. But not with you. I'll go in alone."

"The better way. And now good-bye. God bless you, an' watch over you, an' gather you to Himself at the last. An' what I pray for these, an' for my Michael, an' myself — henceforth I'll pray for you."

Ann joined her son and before Salome realised that she was alone, their figures had vanished into the lustre of light now growing around her. It spread like some luminous exhalation born of earth rather than sky; it was neither fog nor mist, but the incarnate morning stealing over a frozen world. Into this radiancy the mother and son melted and left Salome with her promise.

Therefore she turned, entered the church, and felt a warm breath of air rise round her. The little stove crackled in the silence. There was a rustle of scattered people in the pews, and an occasional cough that echoed hollow.

For a moment she found the experience unendurable. She knelt near an entrance and now rose and prepared to depart. Then the dead arrested her.

“ He’d have said, ‘ Bide and do what she told you,’ ”  
thought Salome.

A man’s voice suddenly ended the silence and — echoes from a far past — his words fell upon her ear strangely. All solemnity had perished from them. The Commandments tinkled, like a child’s little prayer at bed-time.

Presently she followed those who approached the table and knelt before it, where it stood immaculate above, draped in a festal cloth below. Light rained down and quenched the candles and touched the petals of exotic flowers. The air of the sanctuary was sweet with them; but Salome’s thoughts harboured in the dust.

Dayspring broke upon the world and the whole earth shone. Between the morning shadows of the hills there leapt a glory that spread like fire over the frost; each granite turret of the land was touched to gold, and from the East streamed upward a roseal splendour that mantled and flushed the visible universe. Then the sun ascended and all high heaven kindling, flamed with the majesty of the dawn.



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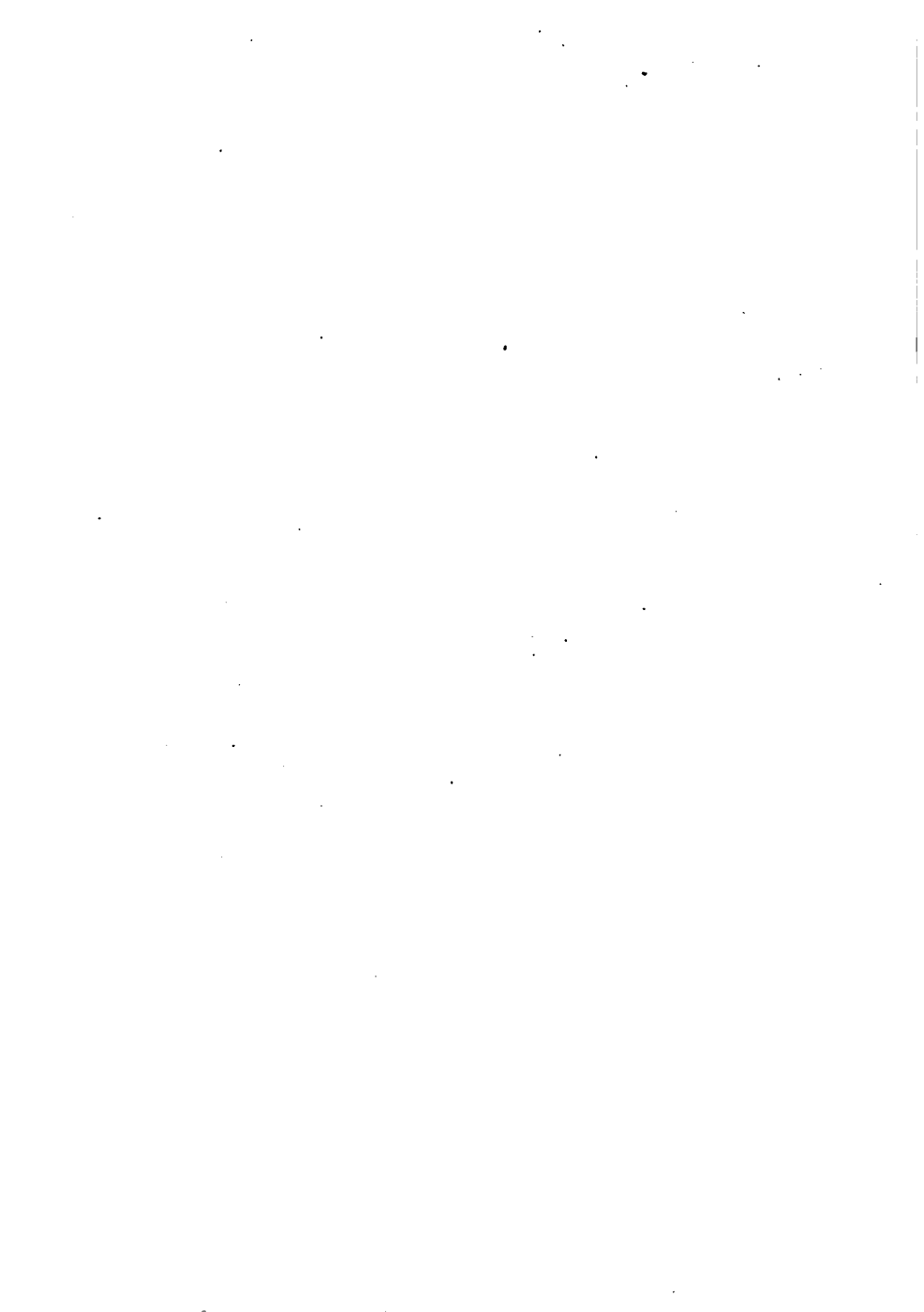
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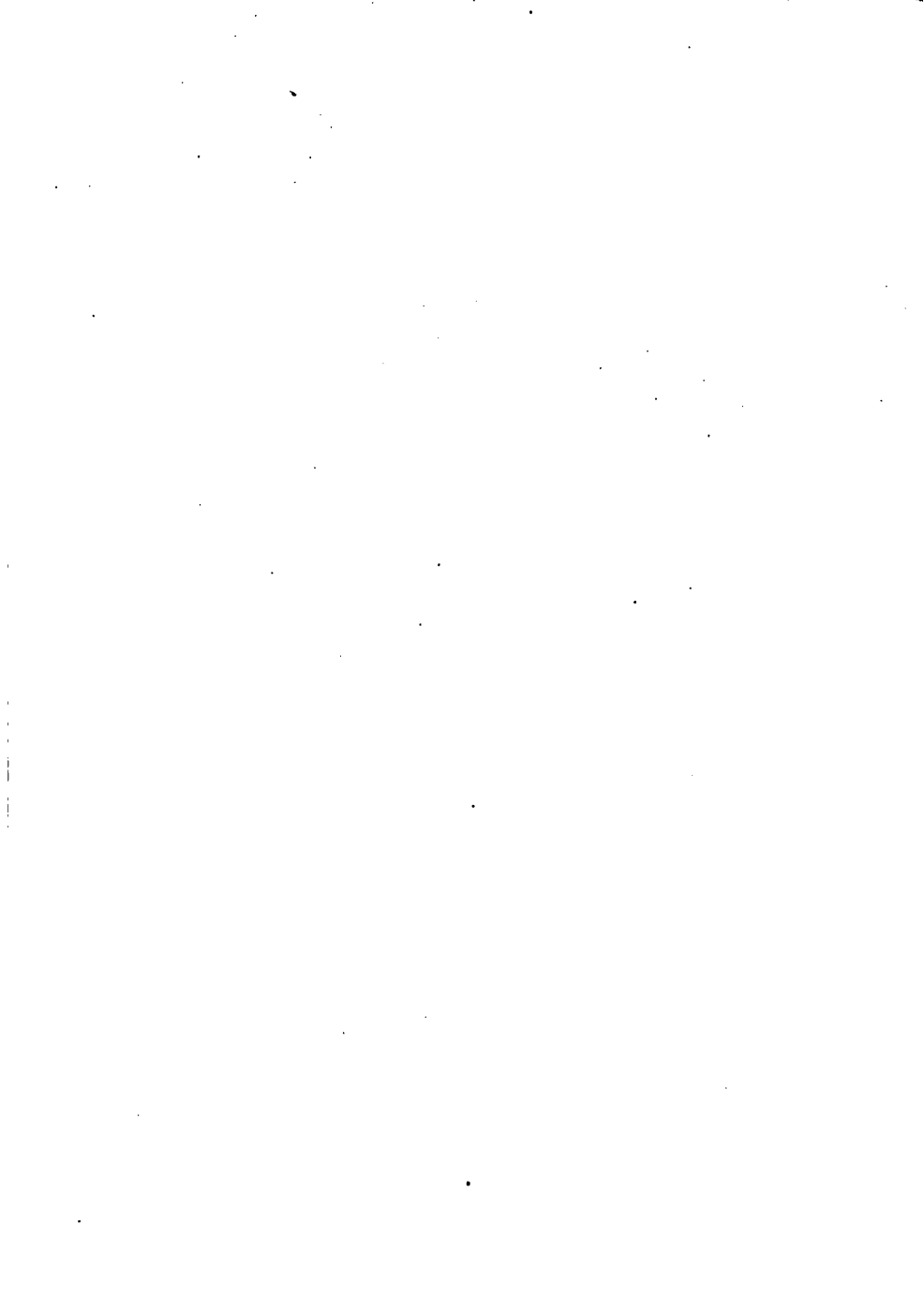
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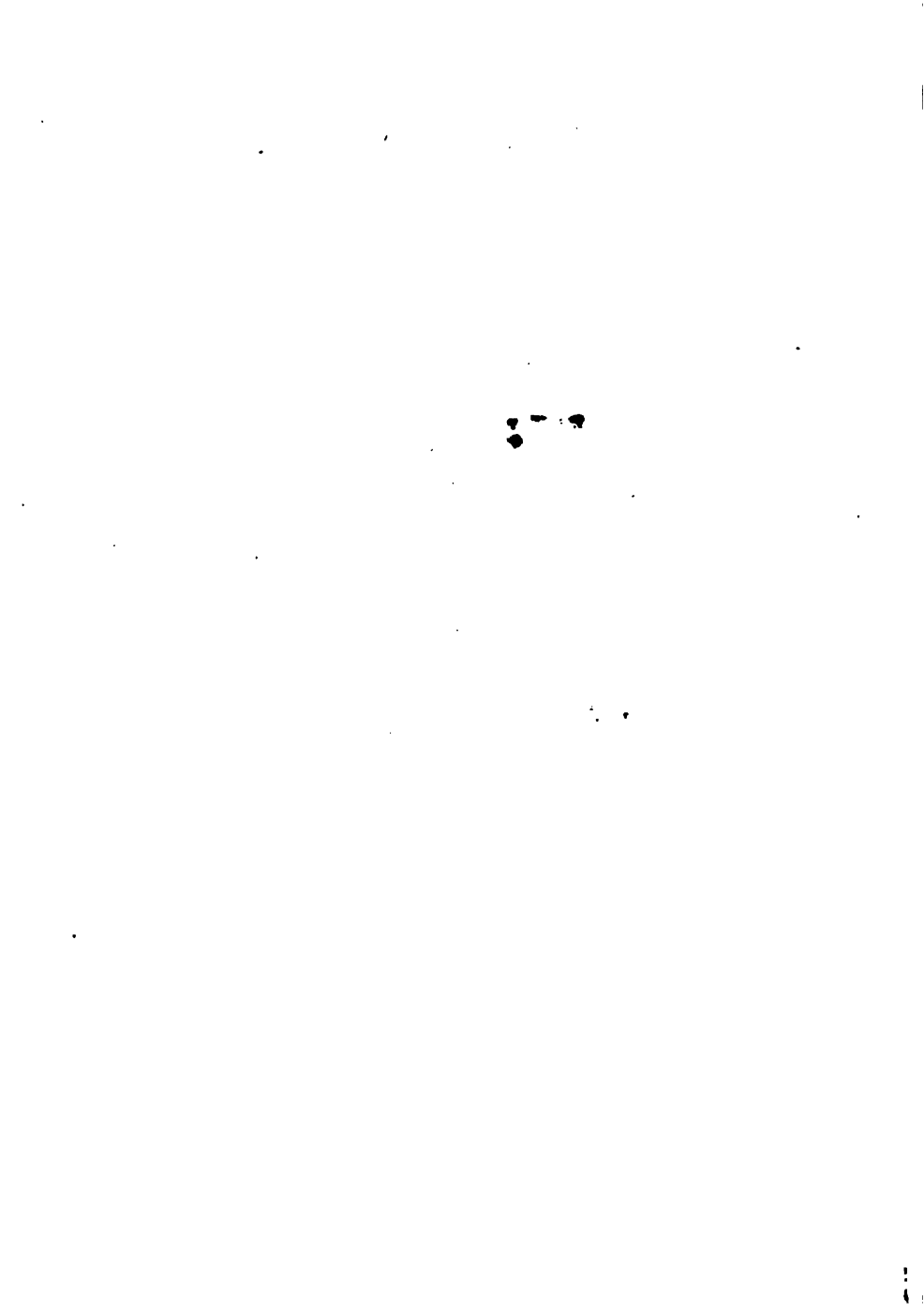












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